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NEW YORK PUBLIC

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9XT

"MOLLY DARLING."

HE steps lightly into the cabin. The reek of the turf smoke makes her blink a little, but she is more or less accustomed to it, so after a second or two hardly feels it. This little cabin is as familiar to her as her own home —"the big house" as the peasants around call it.

"Are you in, Biddy?" cries she, *in her* clear, fresh young voice,

that has now a note of angry defiance in it.

"An' is it you, darlin'?" cries Mrs. Mulvany, coming from the room beyond—if it can be called a separate room, being only divided from the place where Molly is standing by the dresser that holds the china cups and bowls — the pride of the Irish peasant.

"Yes," says Molly. She stands still in the middle of the earthen floor and looks at Bridget Mulvany. "He's come!" says she in a low but tragic tone.

"Save us!" cries the former, crossing herself. "An' what are ye to do now, Miss Molly?"

"I'm not going to stay at home to receive him, anyway!" says Miss Carew, sinking upon a three-legged stool, and casting a determined glance at the devoted Bridget. "*Nothing* shall make me civil to

him. He may be my cousin (only a second cousin, by the way), and he may be a modern Crœsus, and he may have the *audacity* to come down here to ask me to marry him because his *mother* wishes him to do so, but—: Oh!" She breaks off suddenly, and clasping her hands over her knees looks up at Bridget solemnly. "Fancy any one doing anything just because their *mother*"—with infinite scorn—"told them!"

"Well, me dear, a mother's a mother," says Mrs. Mulvany, who is a "numerous" mother herself, and perhaps is afraid of giving herself away too much; Patsy, beyond all doubt, is listening behind the dresser, and Nora is hiding under the settle. "But I understand ye."

If she doesn't she ought, at all events, as she had been Molly's nurse until Mr. Mulvany's attractions had

drawn her out of the big nursery at Duncraig to the little miserable hut.

"It's hard to do a mother's biddin' when there's marryin' in view, an' no heart in it. But what kind is he, Miss Molly, dear? I've always tould meself he'll be as ugly as the divil."

"Do you think I would stay at home to see him, even for one moment? No," cries Miss Carew, with fine fire. "I left the house half an hour before he was expected, and came straight to you."

"An' where would ye come, darlin', excep' to yer ould nurse?" says Mrs. Mulvany, affectionately. "Still, Miss Molly, dear, ye should give an ear to the misthress."

"To mamma? Well, I sha'n't?" cries the wilful Molly. "Nor to this hateful Brian Carew, either. *I—I* feel quite degraded, Biddy, at

the thought that he has been sent down to inspect me—to see if I am worthy—to let his Royal Highness know if it suits him to throw me the handkerchief. I can tell you, Biddy, and I shall tell him, too, to his face some day soon—oh! yes, very soon—that I am not to be asked in marriage in *that* sort of way. I wonder mamma is not ashamed of herself."

"But listen now, darlin'. Faix, the misthress herself tould me that Mr. Brian, the strange young gentleman that's come, didn't know a word about all this. An' besides now, alanna! sure yer a fortune in yerself, let alone the big lot o' money that will be yours on yer father's death—God presarve him!" with another pious crossing of her breast.

"I'm certain he knows all about it," says Molly. "Nothing

would make me believe otherwise: and rather than marry *him*—I," standing up and speaking defiantly, "I would run away from home." She walks to the door. Outside she picks up the light fishing-rod she had laid against the side of the door on entering. "Good-bye, Biddy. I'm going fishing in that little bit of the river up above. If any one asks you where I am, don't tell them. I've made up my mind not to go home before the first bell."

She runs lightly up the road, and is presently out of sight. Almost as she turns the hill a young man in dark grey tweed emerges from off-side of the cabin and goes swiftly after her. His mind is in a tumult of curiosity, indignation, and astonishment. Has his mother *really* sent him here with a view to *marrying* him to his cousin?

He knows there was an old compact between the two branches of the family with regard to this—this most infernal thing. If he had had even the faintest inkling of it he would never have come. He would not have budged one inch. No wonder the girl was annoyed—but, by Jove, how she had gone for him. He had been about to enter the cabin (having been sent in search of her by her mother, who knew very well where she was to be found), but, hearing his own name, had paused. It was disgraceful of him certainly, but he had listened only for a minute or two—he had been too surprised to move away. His own name! in this strange out-of-the-way spot!

"His Royal Highness," she had called him. He had laughed at that. How clear, how sweet, how indignant were the beautiful tones.

He did not notice the faint delicate touch of brogue, having indeed a very generous touch of it himself. Well, he will follow her, if only to see whether the face is as charming as the voice.

. . . .

"You ought to throw it a little more up-stream. There! that's better. Ha! you've got a bite there——"

Considering all things they are now on excellent terms, though Brian can only *hope* this is his cousin Molly, and she has no idea about him at all, except that he is a strange young man—evidently a gentleman—who had come up to her just in time to save her cast that had got hung up in an alder. He had extricated it so successfully, that she felt quite friendly towards him afterwards, and had set him down *in her* own mind as one of the

young men from the barracks at Dulrane, who were for ever coming to spend a day at Lady Blantyre's —who is a great friend of hers.

She has landed her trout now, and her eyes are flashing with delight. She looks up to find her new acquaintance gazing at her curiously.

"You are wondering why I am so excited over a mere fish," says she, laughing and blushing.

"No, not that. I was only thinking how different you look now, to what you did when first I saw you."

"Ah! no wonder. I was in despair about my cast then."

"I saw you before that. You were leaning on the bridge over there —looking a little sad, I thought."

"One must be sad sometimes," says she, sighing. Her joy at the capture of her trout seems to have evaporated.

"*Some* people. But you—must you?" asks he.

"Why should I be a solitary exception? Yes, I *was* sad." She sighs again. He looks so kind, so sympathetic, that she longs to tell him her trouble. Of course, that is impossible—a mere stranger—but——

"I have a friend who is very unhappy," says she, with downcast eyes. Carew can see at once by her confusion that the friend is herself. She is evidently going to tell him the story she has discussed with Bridget. Yes, beyond doubt, it is his cousin, Molly Carew. Well, there might be a worse fate than marriage with her. "She—I hardly know how to tell you about her." She turns suddenly to him. "How would you feel if you were told you must marry some one *you have* never seen in your life?"

"Deuced uncomfortable," says Carew, promptly.

"Well, so does she," says Molly, relapsing into dismal thought.

"Will you forgive me," says he, "if I say that I imagine the friend in this instance is yourself?"

"You are right," says she, moodily. "And to a cousin. I hate cousins—don't you?"

"I'm not sure. I have only one in the world."

"Why, that is like me," cries she. "And a good thing, too, that I have only one, as I am certain he is the most detestable man on earth."

"Ah, there I am more fortunate than you," says he. "I know my cousin to be the prettiest girl in the world."

"Beauty—what is beauty?" says she, disdainfully.

"It has its advantages," returns he, *sententiously*.

"Well, I must be going home," says Molly. She puts up her rod with his assistance, and then holds out her hand frankly with a charming little smile.

"Good-bye," says she. "I have to thank you for the best part of my day. But for you, I don't believe I should ever have disentangled my cast. We shall meet, I daresay, at Lady Blantyre's. I am dining there to-morrow night. Shall you be there?"

"I daresay," says he. He is beginning to feel a little uncomfortable. "May I walk part of the way home with you? Your basket——"

"Oh, no, thanks. If we do not meet," says she, a little shyly, "I should like to know your name. Mine is Carew."

There is a decided pause. *Then*——

"Must I tell you now?" asks he, with an attempt at lightness he is far from feeling, "or will you give me permission to——" "tell it to you later on," he would have said, but she interrupts him.

"Call?" suggests she.

For a moment he grasps at this respite, and then—*Call*—when he will be sitting at dinner with her in her own home in an hour or so!

Good heavens! What is to be done?

"Of course," begins she, a little coldly, "if you don't wish—I—" and she stops. "I beg your pardon," concludes she, frigidly.

"Don't speak to me like that!" entreats the young man, desperately. "The fact is——" he hesitates, then takes the fatal plunge. "My name is *the same as yours*," says he, in a low tone.

Dead silence follows upon this. Presently he looks at her.

"Am I beyond forgiveness? I couldn't help it. I followed you here; I overheard every word you said in a woman's cottage below. Molly," gently, "you have been told that I was sent down here to —for Heaven's sake"—colouring hotly—"forgive my impertinence, but I have to say it—to marry you! That is not true! I knew nothing of any such family arrangement. You will—you *must* believe that!"

She does not answer him. She seems indeed quite taken up with some other and more wonderful thought.

"And so you are Brian!" says she.

"That unfortunately *is* my name," returns he. "I am afraid you will never like me, because *of it.*"

"Oh! I don't know." She moves on a step or two; but he stands still. She looks back.

"As we are going the same way you may as well come with me," said she, a little coldly however.

"Thank you."

They walk on together silently for a while. Then—"You will try not to hate me, won't you?" says he.

"One can't hate all in a moment," demurely.

He catches her eye here, and somehow—*why*, they never know—they both burst out laughing.

"Here, give me your basket," says he, and she surrenders it. "Your rod now." And she gives that up also.

"So you don't believe in hate at first sight?" says he.

"No—of course not."

"There is no 'of course' about

anything in this world. You—you've heard of *love* at first sight, anyway."

"Ye — es," blushing rather warmly. "But I don't believe in that either."

"No? Do you know I used to think like you? But," says Carew, mildly, "I think I'm *beginning* to believe in it."

"Then you are very foolish," says she, but she blushes more deeply still. "Here we are, at home. You can go down by the avenue. I shall go by a short cut, as I fear I am a little late for tea, and I must change my clothes. Good-bye, for the present."

She nods to him and turns down a side path—but he runs after her.

"You—you will give me a chance?" whispers he, taking her hand. "You will forget I am your *detested* cousin Brian?"

"Ah! I shouldn't like to do that," she says softly. She gives him a little glance from under her long lashes.

Stooping he presses his lips to her hand.

GOOD DOG, THEN!

"WILL you come to dinner to-night, Fred?"

"I'm afraid I can't, thanks. I've promised to dine at the 'Rag' with Dick Blount."

"To luncheon to-morrow, then?"

"To-morrow? Let's see——"

"See what?" testily. "I'll tell you what's easy to see, Fred, that *it is* your *sister* who is asking you."

As Mrs. Dalton-Herne says this she gives an angry flick to her fan, and lying back in her chair, pouts a little.

"Just because I am your sister I am nothing to you. You give me the smallest place in your regard!" Her pout grows more pronounced. She taps her small foot upon the Persian prayer rug beneath it, with some indignation, and finally flings her fan on to the couch nearest her, with a petulant gesture.

"You should always pout," says her brother, with a laughing, amused expression, "you do it so well. Lots of women go in for that sort of thing, but they generally fail. It suits you. You are delightful when posing as the injured innocent." He looks at her seriously. "Do it again," says he.

"Oh, nonsense!" says his sister, with some slight show of im-

patience. "I'm not on exhibition; I don't do it to order, I assure you. What a wretch you can be at times, Fred!"

"She mustn't call me names, Pussy, must she?" asks Sir Frederic, who has drawn one of his little nieces on to his knee, and is now amusing himself, or her, by saying, "This little pig went to market," on her tiny fingers. "It's so rude, isn't it, Pussy?"

"You haven't done de 'wee wee' pig yet," says Miss Pussy, oblivious to everything but her game.

"What a frightful omission!" says her uncle. He catches up her last little finger. "And this little pig cried, 'Wee, wee, wee, I can't get over the barn door.'"

"Did she ever get over?" asks Pussy.

"Well, not yet, at all events," *says* Sir Frederic. "But perhaps *she will* soon. Who knows?"

"Do put down that child, Fred," says his sister, "and listen to me. You know I am alone in the world just at present. George is in Wales, and Cissy has gone to stay with the Newtons. I have no one to support me; and there is a guest coming to me, and—— I do want you so badly to come to dinner to-night, and to luncheon to-morrow."

"What? Both? I'm going up in the world."

"You know your own value, if ever any one did," says his sister, disdainfully. "You won't go anywhere or do anything now to oblige anybody; you give yourself Prince's airs."

"Good heavens! What have I done to deserve all this?" says Sir Frederic.

He puts down his little niece and confronts Mrs. Dalton-Herne with *an air that* might have seemed con-

trite if a smile had not lurked behind it. "And what can I do to obliterate my unknown sin?"

"Come to lunch to-morrow."

This persistency awakes a sudden fear within Sir Frederic's breast. He looks hard at her.

"Who is she?" asks he at last.

Mrs. Dalton-Herne lies back in her chair and laughs.

"Oh! If it is that you are afraid of, pray put it out of your mind. It is not an heiress, not even an American one. For 'this time only,' I want you for myself alone. I am not dreaming of your welfare—of settling you. I want only your help. She is coming to-night, and——"

"*She?*"

"Oh, yes, it is a girl! And I'm sure a dreadful one. The more *dreadful* in that she is a cousin of

ours; and I quite dread the first two or three days with her. Fancy having a country girl thrown upon one in the height of the season."

"What cousin is she?"

"Well, you know, one of poor papa's sisters married very badly—a clergyman down in Wiltshire somewhere, I'm not very clear where—a man of good family, I believe, but an absolute pauper!"

"Is he alive?"

"Well, it appears so, though he never said so until last week."

"Too miserable, perhaps; or else too happy."

"Oh, ridiculous! Happy!—on a pittance! Well, this Mr. Hastings who married our aunt wrote to me last week to say he would be glad if I would give his daughter—an only child, and the apple of his eye, and all that sort of thing—a glimpse of the world."

"Cool request, eh?"

"I don't know," says Mrs. Dalton-Herne, with considerable dejection. "I'm bound to say it was the nicest letter. It," reluctantly, "was a charming letter. And in a weak moment—I always tell George I shouldn't be left alone—I answered it, and said I would be delighted to have the girl, and put her through a season."

"Magnanimous Julia!" says her brother.

"Oh, you'd have done just the same," says she, with another pout.

"What! Put up a young woman in my bachelor chambers? Julia, you forget yourself!"

"You can laugh; you can laugh," says she, dolefully, "but what can I do?"

"Cheer up, old girl," says her brother, kindly; "who knows but *that* she may prove a Venus?"

"A Venus!"

"In petticoats, of course," severely. "An original would be too embarrassing even to the most advanced chaperon."

"Look here, Fred, if you are going to be frivolous, I'd just as soon you went away and left me to my fate," says Julia, angrily. She sinks back in her chair and frowns, but presently her indignation dies away beneath her growing fear. "She will be awful. I know it," says she, beginning to cry. "I wish I had had the common sense to refuse to have her!"

"My dear child, what nonsense! She can't be so overwhelmingly bad, after all."

"Yes, she is, I'm sure of it. A great, large-limbed, impossible young person! I have literally no hope; and she will have no clothes either."

"Julia, consider!" says her brother, falling back in his chair, and drawing an antimacassar modestly over his face. "Have I not assured you that no originals are permitted to take their walks abroad in this great London town? There are always the police, my love, and the County Council, and General Booth, and other unimaginative people, who put an end to our little harmless pleasantries."

"It is all very fine for you," says Julia, mopping her eyes. "You haven't to produce her before your guests, and call her your cousin. What am I to do at my receptions—my dinners? Where can I put her?"

"There is always the convenient, if slightly dirty, coal-cellar," says Sir Frederic, hopefully.

At this Mrs. Dalton-Herne loses all patience; she rises and marches *to the door.*

"Come back! come back?" cries her brother, running after her. "I'm sorry—I'm awfully sorry. I sha'n't say another word. I'll do anything I can."

"Oh! do you mean that?" says Julia, turning and laying her hands upon his arm. "Fred, darling, you will come to-morrow; you will help me?"

"Of course I shall help you, Judy."

. . . .

Sir Frederic Steyne, as he rings the bell at his sister's charming house, feels distinctly out of humour this afternoon. There had been so many things waiting for him—so many enjoyable hours that must now be wasted. All because Julia had implored him to throw them away on a country cousin! A cousin, no doubt, with a wide mouth and scarlet hair.

He gives rather a cross little nod to the man who opens the door and who is quite an old friend of his, having come from his own place in the country, and goes up the stairs in a frame of mind that argues badly for the cousin's hour with him at luncheon.

Halfway up the stairs, however, he comes to a standstill, attracted by a sound that comes evidently from a door upon his left. It is a favourite room of Julia's—a room half boudoir, half studio. What *is* the sound?—it approaches very nearly to the word noise—and suddenly it occurs to him that it might be produced by some one running round and round the room. As he pauses, a ringing laugh breaks out—a silvery, soft, very young laugh, and after that the playful barking of a dog.

"What on earth is going on

here?" says Steyne to himself, and with a desire to get as quick an answer to his question as possible, he opens the door abruptly and looks in.

What is "going on" is at once made plain to him, though, perhaps, he had not been quite prepared for it.

What a scene! Here is his sister's pretty room all upset; the chairs pushed this way, the tables that. The screens have been moved into corners, and there—there, at the very end of the room, mounted on the top of the writing-table, stands—the culprit!

Such a charming culprit—a little girl of about sixteen, he tells himself, though later he learns that she is two years older than that—dressed in a white cambric gown, turned down at the neck, with a deep lace collar that falls in Vandyke fashion

over her shoulders. She has evidently sprung from an ottoman beneath her on to the table, to escape her foe. But the foe, a furious little fox terrier, has learned the worth of the ottoman too, and has now his hind paws on it! His front paws are on the table, and his sharp little teeth are tightly embedded in the exquisite lace petticoat that appears beneath the cambric gown.

"Oh, my petticoat! Come and save my petticoat!" cries the culprit, beckoning frantically to Steyne to come and help her. She is holding up the cambric gown, and Sir Frederic can see the lace flounces of the petticoat giving beneath the terrier's excited tugs, who is now too far gone in his game to know discretion. He can see, too, the dainty little feet that show beneath *the* petticoat.

"Get down, you brute," says Sir Frederic, giving the dog a smart slap that brings him to the floor and his senses, in a hurry.

"Oh, don't hurt him—don't," cries the girl, eagerly. "He is the best of dogs really—only he doesn't know what petticoats cost."

"Shall I take *you* down now?" asks Sir Frederic, holding out his hands.

"No; just stand away a little bit," says she, and even as she says it she is by his side, and is giving her frock a little shake to bring it into its proper position once more.

Sir Frederic is staring at her with considerable interest. She has taken up the terrier—now a reformed character and somewhat ashamed of himself—and is talking to him with a grave air.

This gives Steyne time for con-

temptation. Who is she? Why had not Julia said she was expecting guests? Odd as it sounds, it never once occurs to him that this beautiful little girl caressing her dog is the dreaded country cousin from Wiltshire.

A quick glance at her gown has shown him how well she is dressed; a cambric gown, no doubt, but well made, and so becoming! It is evident that those who dress her, love her. Every detail is perfect—the soft frock, the dainty petticoat, the tiny shoes, and that old lace round the snowy throat, and—such a perfect little face peeping out of it all.

"He's sorry—he's quite sorry," says the unknown, looking over the dog's head at Steyne.

"That's a comfort," says Steyne; "perhaps he won't do it again."

"*Oh*, yes, he will, the next

opportunity." She throws back her head and laughs gaily. "I shouldn't like him so well if I didn't know that. I like naughty things, don't you?"

"I'm not sure," says Steyne. It is on the tip of his tongue to say to her, "Are you naughty?" but all at once it seems to him to be a silly rejoinder. He smiles at her instead, and says, lightly, "We ought to be friends, oughtn't we?"

"Friends! That's a great deal!" says she.

"That's an ungrateful speech, at all events. Do you mean to tell me I have not been the means of saving you from a most untimely death?"

She laughs again.

"Well, you saved my petticoat's life, any way," says she. "Yes," frankly, "I will be friends with you."

"Then, how do you do?" says Steyne, holding out his hand.

"Quite well, thank you."

"So glad," says Steyne. This idiotic remark evidently puzzles the pretty child staring at him.

"Why?" asks she; and then, as if ashamed of herself, goes on hurriedly. "How do you do?" says she, as if determined to be as polite as he is.

"I am alive," says Sir Frederic, disconsolately; "and that is as much as any one can expect of one nowadays, especially when one has a disagreeable task before one."

"And you have!"

"Oh, yes; my sister has asked me to come here to-day to entertain a country cousin of ours—a girl of some sort—an awful sort, no doubt. She is to appear at luncheon, I believe. You — you'll be at *luncheon* too?"

"Yes——" slowly. She is looking at him as if in great perplexity.

"What a blessing," says the young man. "I have been quite dreading the hour with this fearful overgrown damsel from some dark corner of our native land. I can imagine her—can't you? A huge, unsophisticated, loud-voiced girl, with big red hands, and bigger, redder—oh, well! it's a comfort that civilisation has removed the necessity of our seeing her feet. Don't you pity me, when you think of my having to help my sister to put such an importation through a season?"

There is a dead silence, then—

"I am afraid I am the cousin," says she, slowly.

"Oh, no! Oh, *don't* say it," says he, a dark red covering his brow. He looks inexpressibly shocked.

"I am afraid I must. I can of course sympathise with you—a country cousin is an infliction, no doubt."

"You should have some mercy," says he. "After all, I didn't know; how could I?"

"Perhaps I am not your cousin, after all," says she, coldly. "It may be all surmise on my part—only it seemed to me that you were a little like Mrs. Dalton-Herne, and *she* certainly is my cousin."

"So am I," says Sir Frederic, quickly. "However angry you may be with me, you can't alter that fact. I am your cousin! I have no prouder boast. I suppose you will never forgive me, but I think you ought to go into the matter a bit. Julia has off and on so many visitors, that I took you for one of them, and——"

"But your cousin would be a *visitor, too.*"

"Certainly, only more of a one, don't you know; and I never connected you with the picture we had drawn of the 'impossible she' from Wiltshire."

If he has hoped to provoke her to a smile here, he finds himself mistaken. She has taken the dog into her arms once more, and her eyes are bent upon his head.

"I am sorry I came," says she, at last.

"I am not surprised that you say that. I quite feel that my conduct is unpardonable," returns he.

His manner is so really miserable that she softens—in a degree. She looks up at him.

"You mustn't say that," says she, coldly but civilly. "It was not a *real* fault of yours. It was a misfortune only. I have no right to be aggrieved."

"For all that you are."

"No, no—I think not!"

"Give me your hand in token of amity, then."

She extends her hand—a small, limp, cold, unforgiving little hand.

"Ah! I knew it," says he, dropping it, "yet, if you would think——"

"I don't want to think," says she, with a sudden burst of passion. Her large blue eyes are now directed full on his, her lips are firm. "Is it such pleasant thinking?——" She stops suddenly, and in a marvellous manner for one so young, controls herself. "I should like to forget," says she, evenly; "so would you, I'm sure. Let us talk of other things."

"As you will," says Steyne. A sense of anger has risen within him. This child—this baby—to so put *him down*! He had been in the

wrong, no doubt, but he had explained, apologised—and she would have none of his apologies! Her whole manner points to the fact that she wishes him for the future to be a mere acquaintance — not a cousin. Well, why not accept the fiat? He throws off the touch of offence that has marked his latest manner, and coming nearer to her strokes the dog's head with a smiling air of perfect indifference. As a man of the world he tells himself he has many arts with which to subdue a little ill-tempered child like this.

"A fox terrier. Looks well bred," says he, sticking his glass in his eye. He had looked for a sudden confusion in her because of his change of tone from one of deep regret to one of fashionable indifference, but the girl meets his move with just such another.

"Yes. Isn't he *a heart?*" says she, with enthusiasm. "Look up, Dandy, look up, and let me introduce you to this new acquaintance."

Perhaps the girl had hoped that Dandy, being so entirely *en rapport* with herself, would have shared her feeling of anger towards Steyne and have declined to acknowledge him, as even an acquaintance. But if so, Dandy disappoints her. In answer to Steyne's not over sympathetic snap of the fingers, Dandy springs into his arms, and seems well content to make friends with him.

Could any knowledge of the future have sharpened the poor creature's desire to cling to, and arouse an interest in, Steyne?

"Your dog likes me," says Steyne, with a faint emphasis.

"Dandy has beautiful manners,"

returns she, giving him a little thrust in turn.

"I hope you will allow me to cultivate his acquaintance then," says Steyne, flushing. "He may improve mine."

Fortunately at this moment, when war seems imminent, Mrs. Dalton-Herne appears in the doorway.

"Been making friends already? How delightful!" cries she, innocent of irony. "Luncheon is ready, however; so come down, come down."

"Give me one moment," says Connie Hastings, catching her dog out of Sir Frederic's arms and running out of the room.

"Am I not fortunate, Fred? Am I not lucky?" exclaims Julia, as she disappears.

"*You* may be lucky."

"Why, what's the matter?"

"What the deuce did you mean

by telling me your expected guest would be a huge, gawky, under-bred creature?"

"Why, you don't mean to say that you——"

"Yes, I did; I did with a vengeance. I gave her a perfect photograph of herself as we expected to see her."

"Oh, Fred, you might have left me out!"

"Well, I didn't; she'll never forgive me."

"Yes, she will. She is not a fool. Did you ever see such a charming face? Isn't she a darling?"

Sir Frederic pauses, then, "It is an excellent name for her," says he, slowly.

Now this answer frightens Mrs. Dalton-Herne, who has her brother's matrimonial arrangements very much at heart.

"Oh, no doubt! no doubt!"

says she, airily, "still one must remember, Fred, that she has no position, and no fortune—not a farthing. Do remember that."

"I'm not likely to forget it when you're here," says her brother, grimly. He pauses. "I don't care about farthings!" says he.

. . .

It is next day, and Sir Frederic Steyne, in a hansom, is tearing down to his sister's house, as though life and death depend upon his being there in time. It has never occurred to him to question himself as to why he is so anxious to lunch with Julia two days running—all he knows is, that it seems an eternity since he parted with that ill-tempered, unforgiving, beautiful little girl yesterday.

He had learned at luncheon that her name was Connie. Constance! What a terrifying name to him, who

is in her bad graces! Will she be all too constant in her anger against him?

There is some nervousness in his manner as he knocks at the hall door, but, once in, nervousness and everything else, except pity, dies from him.

Here, with her hands pressed against her face, and sobbing bitterly, is Connie. Such a miserable Connie—like Niobe, all tears.

Julia is standing near her, with her arms round her, and the footman, the butler, and the page have all grief stricken attitudes, descriptive of the direst grief.

"What has happened? What is it?" says Sir Frederic, hurrying up to them.

"Oh, Dandy! My darling Dandy!" says Connie, raising herself a little from Julia's embrace to look at him.

Her lids are swollen, her lips trembling. It is absurd to say a girl looks well when she is crying in real earnest; yet, however she looks, it is a positive fact that at this moment Sir Frederic, gazing at her sad little face uplifted to his, knows that he loves her. He had been attracted by her yesterday in her gaiety and youth; to-day, in her grief, he knows that his heart is at her feet.

"You can all go away now," says Mrs. Dalton-Herne, with a gesture to the servants. "Sir Frederic will give you directions later."

"Is the dog——"

"Oh, no, not dead; he can't be dead," says Connie, miserably. "Julia, you don't think he is dead?"

"My dear, of course not. Connie, darling, don't be so cast down."

"But what is the matter, then?" asks Steyne.

"Oh, I'll tell you," says Connie, still sobbing slightly.

"Yes, darling, tell Fred," says Mrs. Dalton-Herne, soothingly. She gives a communicative glance at Steyne. "I've got some letters to send off. Do what you can for her. I'll be back in a minute," says she. "But, Fred, dearest, do remember!"

It is evident that it is with some reluctance she leaves them. She would not have left them at all probably had she not noticed how extremely cold, not to say forbidding, had been Connie's manner to Sir Frederic at luncheon yesterday.

"Now tell me," says Steyne, turning to Connie, "what has become of your dog."

"He is lost—lost! I took him *out to* the door this morning,

because I wanted to see how a real street looked, and suddenly Dandy ran away from me, down the steps, and away, and away, and round the corner; and though I ran after him half way down the street, I could not see him again. I stayed there for a long time."

"Where?"

"At the corner. But he was nowhere—nowhere at all. And then Julia sent the footman for me, and she said I shouldn't be there without my hat—as if my hat mattered when Dandy was lost—and now—now—oh! where is my lovely Dandy?"

She draws back from him and covers her face with her hands once more. She is dissolved in tears.

"Don't do that," says he. "Don't cry! There's hope yet."

"Hope?"

"Yes, dogs are often stolen in

town, but—sometimes they are recovered."

"You mean that Dandy——"

"That Dandy may yet be restored to you. How fond you are of him!" says he a little bitterly.

"Fond! I love him," says the girl. "Pappy gave him to me. He was small—a tiny thing—a weenchy, *weenchy* pup"—putting her fingers together in a sort of cage as she speaks, as if to show the diminutiveness of her pet when first she saw it—"and I have taken care of him ever since—such care! Where is he now!" says she, looking up at Steyne with miserable eyes. "Ah! That is what I fear—that some one has taken him who will be unkind to him, and he wouldn't understand that!"

"It won't be for long," says Steyne.

"Who can tell that? Julia says the police will get him for me. But the police wouldn't know him." She bursts into fresh weeping. "He was such a good, *good* Dandy," says she.

"I'll get him," says Steyne, suddenly—foolishly, perhaps—but it seems to him at this moment that he must find the dog for her.

"You—you!"

"Yes. And—Connie—if I do, will you forgive me?"

He has taken her hand.

"Oh, go, go!" says the girl, eagerly. "Forgive you—I'll forgive you *anything* if you will only bring back Dandy!"

It was very slight encouragement, certainly, and Steyne having left her has time, whilst driving to the Battersea Home, to dwell upon the poverty of it. Still, she has certainly promised forgiveness.

He had taken pains to pick out as smart a looking horse as he could see before jumping into a hansom, but the smartest horse in the world is of little use when a block occurs; just now, Steyne finds himself behind a brougham, with an omnibus beside him.

Idly, and without thought, his eyes scan the occupants on the top of the omnibus; presently, as they travel slowly and without interest towards the box seat, they all at once grow eager and excited. His gaze has fallen on a small object securely held under the arm of a man.

It is a dog! But what dog? What dog is it like? Steyne had seen Dandy for only five minutes or so, and as those five minutes had been filled with horror of his unfortunate mistake, he had not had much time to study him. And yet, *surely* he had seen that dog before.

Something in the little creature's eyes, terrified, distended, looking this way and that, suggests the idea of captivity; and, indeed, even as Steyne is staring at him, the little creature makes a bound, escapes the man's restraining arm, dashes to the front and down the steps, and is away beneath the carriage wheels and horses' feet—somewhere.

The sharp oath that passes the man's lips can be distinctly heard by Steyne—he sees him rise—an ill-looking ruffian, with a filthy cap pressed down over as rascally a pair of brows as ever met over squinting eyes—and fling himself down the omnibus steps in hot pursuit of the terrier.

It doesn't take Steyne a second to pay off his driver, to spring from his cab, and—careless of plunging horses and angry policemen—gain the pavement. He has been so

swift in his movements, that he reaches it almost as the man does, and there—someway further on—is the dog, running, in a rather distracted, lost sort of way, but running for its life.

The ruffianly-looking person with the unpleasant cap has, in spite of all Steyne's efforts, got beyond him—it is not always easy to hurry in a crowded thoroughfare—but both turn down a side street comparatively deserted, and the man seeing his chance breaks into a sharp run. He is evidently quite unconscious of the fact that he has a pursuer, and therefore gives his legs full play, and Steyne, in a perfect rage of fear, sees him gaining on the dog, who looking back every moment in a frightened, terrified fashion, now over this ear, now over that, has begun to run more slowly, as *though* hope is dead within his

poor little heart. In another moment or two his illegal captor will have him again—there will be a quick rush round a corner, and after that—

"Dandy! Dandy!" calls Sir Frederic, in a loud clear voice. He is not even now sure that it is the actual "Dandy," but as a last resource he tries what the effect his call will have upon the dog.

The effect is instantaneous. The terrier stands still for a moment, hesitates—looks at the owner of the voice—and then . . . It seems but a second before he has flung his small body upon Steyne—upon his knees, his breast even; leaping from the ground, panting, exhausted; but, oh! so thankful!

The poor little thing had recognised him, had seen a friend in him. His miserable little paws are now clinging to Steyne's trousers, soiling

them dreadfully, but Steyne doesn't seem to care. The poor brute's bright eyes are looking at him with eager entreaty in them.

The young man stoops down and takes him into his arms, altogether regardless of the destruction done to his perfect get-up.

"There, there. Good dog, then! You will soon be back with your mistress."

He pats the frightened creature and soothes it. All this has taken a moment or two—in which the man with the cap has slunk away. He had understood. He disappeared.

Steyne with the dog in his arms looks round for a hansom. Oddly enough, the driver whom he had so summarily dismissed is coming down the street. He hails him. The man grins down at him.

"Was it to get back that dog, *sir?*"

"Yes, it was," says Sir Frederic. He laughs up at him. "If it hadn't been for that block I should never have done it," says he. "You have brought me luck, but the luck mustn't be all on one side. Drive me as hard as you can to"—and he gives the address in Park Lane—"and you shall have a sovereign."

. . . .

To re-enter the house, to get through the hall, and up to Julia's boudoir doesn't take a second.

Opening the door very softly, he looks in. Seated at a table, the very picture of grief, is Connie.

She seems deaf to his entrance. He looks at her a moment or two, and is hardly certain whether it will be better to call to her or step forward, when all responsibility is taken out his hands by Dandy.

That sensible terrier decides upon immediate speech. He breaks out

into a violent fit of barking—a sort of jubilee declaration of his return, and, scrambling out of Steyne's arms, runs straight to his mistress.

"Dandy!"

It is a little cry. She is on her knees beside him, her arms round him, the tears running down her cheeks.

"Dandy—darling!"

After a little while she rises, the dog still clasped in her arms, as though she is afraid of losing him again, and looks at Steyne.

"Where did you find him?" asks she.

"It was a rescue," says Steyne, laughing, and going up to her. "You must thank Dandy for his deliverance, even more than you thank me. He knew me at once, the moment I called him." He gives her a little graphic description *of his* first glimpse of the dog on

the top of the omnibus, and the run down the side street.

"Oh, *how* shall I tell you what I feel?" cries she, with sparkling eyes, when his somewhat airy account has come to an end. "I don't care what you say, it is to you only all the praise is due. If you hadn't seen my precious Dandy, and called to him, he couldn't have run to you. And what a life he would have had with that awful man!"

"Probably not. The awful man would have sold him to somebody who might have given him a happy home."

"He would never have been happy without me," says Connie, with conviction.

"Well, really I don't see how he could," says Sir Frederic, with a rather prolonged glance at her, that brings a slight colour to her cheek.

"It seems abominable of me to

say anything about it," continues he, after a moment. "But you *did* promise me something if I brought you back Dandy."

"I——?"

"Yes, your forgiveness."

"Oh, that!"

"It is a great deal. A great deal to me. I cannot be happy without it. You are very anxious about Dandy's happiness. You might give a thought or two to mine."

"I forgive you—I do, indeed!" says the girl, earnestly. "If there is anything to forgive. But you didn't know—you *couldn't* have known—and," smiling up at him, "even if you had committed a regular big crime, I should forgive you now for bringing me back my little sweetheart here."

She hugs Dandy to her breast.

"Connie," says Sir Frederic,

who is now a little pale, "is Dandy your only sweetheart?"

Connie stares at him, as if surprised, and grows very red.

"Why, of course—of course," says she, confusedly.

"Ah, well," says Steyne, drawing a quick breath, "that is good news. I will ask you one thing more. Give me time. Don't harden your heart against me. Give me a chance."

Perhaps her arms have loosened themselves around Dandy; however it is, that grateful dog jumps to the ground, and with many friendly barks runs to his preserver.

"Your dog likes me," says Steyne, glancing at her meaningly over Dandy's head, as he stoops to pat him.

"I like you, too," says Connie, in a low tone.

"Do you mean that, Connie?"

He has taken her hand, and bending over it, kisses it gravely.

"How can you ask?" says she, shyly. "Have you not saved my dear Dandy?"

Dandy is still tearing round him, barking delightedly. Steyne catches him up, and solemnly presses his lips to his sleek head.

"*Good dog, then!*" says he.

And, indeed, perhaps he owes as much to Dandy as Dandy owes to him.

ROMEO AND JULIET.

"WHERE are you going, Letitia?" demands Miss Banbridge, severely, gazing at the trembling Letitia over a pair of gold-rimmed glasses.

"Just out for a little walk, auntie. The day is so delicious," says Letitia with her most engaging smile. What an awful thing it will be if auntie forbids her to go out to-day,

of all days, and Jack waiting for her at the top of the meadow.

"Now, once for all, Letitia, let this be understood between us," says Miss Banbridge, "there is to be no intercourse between this household and that of The Court. You may think I am too old to hear things—but there you are wrong. I have heard a good deal lately about this young Mr. Hardinge, who has returned to The Court on his father's death; heard too, with deep regret, Letitia, that you so far forgot yourself as to dance with him a fortnight ago at the Mainwarings' little——"

"Hop," suggests Letitia, who is too frightened by her aunt's allusion to the young master of The Court, to remember her society manners.

"Hop! How dare you use such a word?" cries Miss Banbridge. "*Good* Heavens! The manners

of this present day. Now, Letitia, hear me. It seems you did dance with this objectionable young man at the Mainwarings' dance," emphasised, "and perhaps after all you could not well help that. But knowing as you do, the feud that has lasted for fifty years between their house and ours, I trust you have too much respect for me—for your name—to recognise a Hardinge anywhere."

"But what has he—er—" nervously, "what have they all done?" asks Letitia, her eyes on the marble pavement of the hall, her heart at the top of the meadow. Good gracious! if auntie only knew that she had been meeting Jack every day for the past fortnight, ever since that long dance, indeed, when—when—well, he wouldn't dance with any one but her. And it is all such nonsense, too. A rubbishy

old story about a right of way that happened fifty years ago—and Jack the dearest, dearest fellow!

"I refuse to go into it," says Miss Banbridge with dignity. "It suffices to say that this hateful young man's grandfather once behaved in the grossest fashion to your grandfather—my," with a sigh, "sainted father. If you are going for a walk I trust that if you meet the—the present owner of that detestable place called The Court, you will not so much as acknowledge his presence with a bow."

"I sha'n't bow to him, auntie," says Letitia, in a very small voice. Detestation of herself and her duplicity is still raging in her heart as she meets Jack Hardinge in the old trysting-place. She had certainly promised her aunt not to *bow* to him. Well, she doesn't;

she only flings herself into his arms —glad young arms that close fondly round her!

"Oh, Jack, she's getting worse than ever. She was simply raging about you as I came out. I really thought she was going to forbid me to come at all. She says you're an objectionable young man!"

"Oh! I say," says Hardinge. "What have I done to be called names like that?"

"Nothing, nothing!" cried Letitia, flinging her arms abroad in despairing protest, "except that your grandfather once punched my grandfather's nose."

"Well, I'm awfully sorry," said Hardinge, at which they both laugh. "Would it do any good, do you think, if I were to go down now and apologise for my exceedingly rude old forebear?"

"I shouldn't advise you to try it," says Letitia.

"But what are we to do, then?" says Jack, his arm round her.

They are sitting on the grass, safely hidden behind a clump of young trees. The sun is shining madly on their heads, the birds are singing on every branch. It is May—delightful May, the lover's month—and the hottest May that has been known for years.

"I don't know," says Letitia, with deep despondence.

"It's such beastly folly," says Hardinge, presently, in an impatient tone. "If I were a fool, or a poor man, or a reprobate, but I'm not that—am I now."

"Oh, no," says Letitia; she creeps closer to him, and encircles his waist with her arm; or at all events tries bravely to do so. It *doesn't* go half way round, but that

doesn't matter. She grasps a bit of his coat, and holds on to him so. "Do you know what you are, Jack? The dearest old boy on earth."

"And you—do you know what you are?" says Hardinge, pressing her fingers to his lips.

"No," says she.

"Well, I can't tell you," says he, "because there is nothing on earth fit to compare you with. You are *you*, and that's all!"

"What a lovely speech! No wonder I love you," says Letitia, naively; "but," collapsing into gloom, "what's the good of it all? Auntie will never let you marry me."

"We could marry without her permission," says he, slowly.

"No. No, we couldn't," says Letitia with decision. She looks at him earnestly. "I wouldn't

marry you without her permission, for anything. We would have to run away, and that would break her heart. I am all she has in the world, and though she scolds me a good deal, I love her. I wouldn't desert, Jack."

"You could come back again," says he.

"Of course, I know that. But then she would always feel disappointed in me, and hurt, and—No, no, I shall never do that. She trusts me so."

"Then I don't know what's going to be the end of it," says he.

"We must only wait," says Letitia, despondingly. "And now, Jack, you had better go. She is sure to come up here presently to see how the men are getting on with that fence (you know what an excellent woman of business she *is*), *and if* she caught *you* here——"

"There would be wigs on the green," says Jack, laughing. "Well, good-bye—for a while. I suppose if I come back again this evening, I shall find you here?"

"Yes! Oh, yes! Jack, do take care, the men will see you!"

"Not they," says Jack, kissing her again. "And you, what are you going to do whilst I'm away?"

"Think of you," with a little saucy glance at him from under her long lashes. "By the by, have you got a match about you?"

"What on earth do you want them for?" says he, giving her some out of his little silver box as he speaks. "Going to have a cigarette?"

"Nonsense! I feel as if I want to set fire to some of those dry little bunches of grass; fairy tufts we used to call them long ago; they would burn beautifully to-day, the sun is so hot."

"Well, don't set fire to yourself, whatever you do," says he, thoughtlessly. Once again they kiss, and part really this time.

Letitia stands watching him till he is out of sight, standing on tiptoe as he gets over the wall to blow a last kiss to him with her fingers, then coming out from the shelter of her trysting-place, walks into the old meadow, now eaten down save where the tall, coarse tufts of grass are growing. Lighting one of her matches, she kneels down and sets fire to the tuft nearest her. It used to be an old amusement of hers in her childish days, and she is not yet so far removed from them as to have lost all childish fancies. Sitting down on the side of a tiny hillock at a distance, she watches and admires the pretty, dancing flames—so small—so flickering—*so harmless.*

She leans back against the bank behind her, and crosses her white arms behind her head. What a day it is!—most heavenly sweet—quite a drowsy day. How lovely that light smoke is, climbing slowly uphill, and fading away amongst the young beech trees above. And the little flames, like fairies, dancing—perhaps they are the fairies who dwell in those old, dry tufts. No wonder they are dancing, with rage, evidently. Their strongholds seized, destroyed by the Tyrant Man! No—Woman this time. Ah, ah! In *this* case woman has come to the front at all events. She had been reading about the emancipation of women last night, and had laughed over it. After all, she didn't want to be emancipated; she only wanted Jack to love her always — nothing more. Perhaps the other queer women only meant

that too, only they hadn't found their Jacks yet. Pouf! How warm it is!

Gradually her head sinks back upon her arms, her eyelids droop over the soft, clear eyes. How delicious it is here! How cosy! Again the eyes open, but very lazily this time. See how the little insects run to and fro over her white frock, hither and thither, all in search of the great want—food. A passing thought makes her laugh indolently. She hopes they will not make food of her. And then the eyelids close resolutely; she leans back. Sleep has caught her.

So sound, indeed, is her slumber that she does not know that now the little black insects are rushing over her, not in search of anything but safety—safety from the tiny hot flames that are creeping, creeping every moment closer to the

thin white frock. Now they have touched her foot, and have so far penetrated through the thin slipper as to make her unpleasantly warm, but not enough to waken her. She only turns a little and sighs; but now——!

Now she springs to her feet with an affrighted scream. Smoke! Smoke everywhere! And what is this creeping up the front of her gown? A thread of fire. It blows upon her face. She recoils from it, but it follows her. Madly she lifts her hands and tries to beat it back. The men!—the men at the fence! where are they? Alas! they have all gone to their dinner. Once again a frantic cry bursts from her lips.

It is answered: It is at this moment indeed that Hardinge reaches her, and flinging off his coat catches her in it, and folding it round her, *holds her* as if in a vice.

What brought him back at this moment (beyond the mercy of God) he never knows, except that those last words of his, "Don't set fire to yourself at all events," had seemed to haunt him since he left her. He had been going to a farm of his that led past Miss Banbridge's estate, and a foolish fear about the words had touched his lover's heart and compelled him to mount the wall and look over. In a moment he had seen.

He had quenched the flames in a most miraculously short time. Letitia is even able to stand up and answer faintly his passionate questions to her as to her safety, when suddenly a voice strikes upon them that renders both dumb.

It is the voice of Miss Banbridge. She has been toiling up the hill. She looks almost distraught.

"*Oh*, sir," cries she, catching

Letitia in her arms, "I saw all. I thought I should have died. Oh! my girl! My darling child!" (She spends her whole life tormenting Letitia, but Letitia for all that is the apple of her eye.) "Oh, sir! how can I thank you? The gratitude of my life is yours. The preserver of my pretty child." Then the old lady bursts out crying. She would have died rather than tell Letitia she was pretty half an hour ago, but now she lays many offerings at her feet. Poor feet. They might have been burned. "If you will add one more service to the immeasurable one you have already done me," says she, softly, "you will help me to get my poor child back to the house."

"But," begins Hardinge. It seems terrible to him, even at this supreme moment to deceive the old

lady, to go into her house under false pretences. If she knew his name, oh . . . A little pressure from the hand of Letitia decides him. How can he have scruples when she is so ill—so frightened?

Silently he passes his arm round her, and with her aunt takes her back to the house.

They lay her on a sofa; Miss Banbridge flings a rug over her burnt dress.

"She must rest here a little to get strength before going upstairs," says she.

"Miss Banbridge," says the young man, now turning with determination towards her—not another moment will he brook this deception—"I—I wish to say——"

"Oh, sir, it is what *I* have to say," says Miss Banbridge, with emotion. "I have not half thanked *you*. *How* can I? If there is

anything I can do—any way in which I can show my gratitude to you—pray name it." How easily he could have named it. "In the meantime," says she, "pray, tell me the name of the brave man who has delivered my niece from the very jaws of death."

"My name——" stammers he.

"Your name, sir—that I may reverence it all the remaining days of my life!"

"Hardinge," says he, shortly.

"What!" Miss Banbridge has fallen back in her chair, staring at him with wild eyes.

"Yes; Hardinge," says the young man, steadily, if sorrowfully. He pauses. "After all," says he, "I can't help my name."

There is a pause; Letitia draws her breath sharply.

"That is true!" says Miss Banbridge, at last, in a severe undertone.

"I can't help having had a grandfather, either," says Hardinge, taking another step.

"No; I suppose not," most reluctantly.

"Most fellows have grandfathers!"

"I cannot contradict you, sir."

"Miss Banbridge," said Hardinge, going closer to her, and gazing at her with all his heart in his eyes, "you asked me just now if there was any way in which you could show your gratitude to me—about —about this thing. I want no gratitude. I would have gladly died to save your niece a pang. But—but you have given me the opportunity to tell you that I want —*her!* I love her. She loves me. Give her to me!"

"Letitia!" says Miss Banbridge, in a strange voice.

"*Oh*, yes! It is true," says

Letitia, bursting into tears. "I *do* love him. I loved him that night at the Mainwarings'—and I have loved him better and better every day since. He," her sobs increasing, "he used to come and see me in the meadow; where—where I was nearly burned!"

Whether this allusion to the late catastrophe, that might have ended in a tragedy, stills Miss Banbridge's wrath, or whether her old heart has been softened by Hardinge's plain acknowledgment of his love for her niece, no one can tell. She turns to Hardinge with a pale face, but a not wholly unkindly air—

"I must have time to think," says she. She hesitates and then says: "This is very painful to me, Mr.—Hardinge." It seems certainly painful to her to pronounce his name—the name so long tabooed in her household. "I must have

time—time." She grows silent. The hearts of the lovers sink. Suddenly she looks up again.

"Perhaps you will do me the honour to dine with me to-morrow night?" says she. Her tone is icy, but the two listening to her feel their cause is won. To ask Mr. Hardinge to dine—to accept hospitality at her hands! Oh! surely the old feud is at an end.

A little sound escapes from Letitia.

"You are cold," says Miss Banbridge, anxiously, who had thought the sound a shiver.

"A little," says Letitia, who indeed is shivering from her late fear of what her aunt was going to say.

"I shall fetch another rug," cries the old lady, running out of the room.

"*An* opportunity once lost is

never to be regained," says the ancient copybooks. Hardinge and Letitia make up their minds at once not to lose theirs. His arms are round her in an instant, her cheek is pressed against his.

"It is all right. She will give in. I feel as if I loved her," says Hardinge.

"Oh! Jack," says Letitia, "wasn't it a good thing I was nearly burned to death?"

"Oh! hush, darling. Hush, Letty! I can't bear to think of this day."

"Well, I can," says she, laughing feebly. "I shall think of it always. It has given us to each other for ever."

"WAS IT A SPIRIT?"

"IT is such a chance!" says he, getting up from his chair, and beginning to walk with feeble but excited steps up and down the room. "It may never come to me again! If once I got on to that paper, Mary," turning eyes sunken and hollow indeed, but now burning with fever, upon his young wife, who is *sitting* watching him with loving

anxiety. "I feel—I feel as if I should have taken one step at all events in Fortune's direction. But my brain—it refuses to work! Try as I will, no plot—no scenes will come to me."

He sinks into his chair again. A heavy sigh breaks from him.

"You forget how weak you are still," says Mrs. Dormer, softly. "Give up this thought, Dick. You cannot work yet. That fever has left you very low and tired. Write and say you cannot attempt this story."

"What nonsense!" cries he, irritably. "Do you think we can afford to throw away such an opening? Have you thought, Mary, that actual want lies before us? And now too with Christmas approaching, and—and——" His slight touch of temper dies away, his fine and tender face grows

sad. "And — with the coming little one to think of! Oh! my poor girl!"

In an instant she is on her knees beside him. With divine tenderness she encircles him with her arms.

"God will look after us all," says she; "do not despair. I am not uneasy, Dick, really. What would make me uneasy would be the thought that you were trying to work your brain now, when you are so ill—so weak. What would all the money in the world be to me, if I lost you. For my sake, darling boy, be patient."

"I try to be. Don't mind me, Mary, if sometimes I speak crossly to you: you know how it is with me—you know how I love you." They kiss each other, fondly, sadly.

"*But* just think what a chance

lost it is. Where is Merrydew's letter? Ah! here it is."

"DEAR DORMER, — I hear Benson, editor of 'The Universal World,' has been disappointed about his Christmas story. Man who was to have written it has died suddenly. He is now on the look-out for something. I mentioned you to him. He sniffed a little—you are a young 'un, you know, in the field of Fame —said if you could send something in next week—about 25,000 words —he would look at it. Couldn't possibly promise to take it; but it struck me as being a chance for you. Hoping you are better. Kind regards to Mrs. Dormer, &c.——"

"Such a kind letter!" says Mary.

"There is no one like Merrydew. And now to let the whole thing go!" He looks at her despairingly.

In truth it is a hard case. Dick Dormer had begun life with ten thousand pounds inherited from his father. This sum he had invested very advantageously, and coming up to London, fired with the thought of being a second Dickens, he had thrown his whole soul into his efforts to rise to the calm waters of an assured literary success. Beyond doubt he was extremely talented, but circumstances went against him.

He had barely indeed established himself in London when he fell in love. This naturally took his mind a good deal off his work. Then the interest of his ten thousand pounds bringing him in something close to £400 a year, he married Mary Merton—this, however, must not be counted amongst his misfortunes, as any man who *married* Mary must have felt him-

self the richer for it. After his marriage he had applied himself to work with steady force, but a fever raging just then in the locality round him, had caught him and brought him to death's door: and hardly was he raised from his sick bed, when the sudden failure of the bank in which all his money was invested stood out in large letters in all the public prints.

This meant ruin. Now, nothing was left him, but his pen to support his wife and the expected little one! No wonder when this letter came from his friend Merrydew that the poor fellow's heart sank, and his courage gave way, as he felt how impossible it was, in his present state of weakness, to accept the tempting offer open to him.

"If I could only concentrate my mind," says he. He presses his hands to his temples. They are burning.

"There is time yet. A whole week," says Mary, earnestly—though she has no hope of his being able to undertake the task. "Only 25,000 words. You could do it in a hurry—at the end—if you gave yourself a rest until then."

Poor soul! Her one thought is for his health.

"How can I rest," says he, "when I think of you. And yet, Mary, what can I do?"

"Why, rest, darling," says she. "If you want to please me—do that."

. . . .

It is midnight. Dormer being awake, afraid to stir lest he should disturb his wife, is thinking of his future in a very gloomy fashion. No health, no money, no prospects! And this great chance that had come to him, to be perforce flung *aside*. A very madness of despair

seizes hold of him. Oh! that his brain would but work again, as it used to three months ago! he might then make at least an effort to win a place in "The Universal World." Such an opening! He has sufficient faith in himself to know, that once given a start, he could outrun a great many on the road to fame.

The damp breaks out upon his brow. How in the dead darkness he struggles with himself, his inner self! There had been a thought—early last week it had come to him and faded—faded away hopelessly, he could never catch hold of it again. Now, for an instant it comes to him again.

Oh! to grasp it before it leaves him for ever.

It was not much of a plot but it was something—a settled idea at all events. And of late his ideas have been all vague.

He puts out his hands to reach the sheet of paper and pencil he usually keeps on the table at the side of his bed, to scribble on it any thoughts that fly to his mind during the waking hours of darkness. This was a habit of his before his terrible illness, and with a sort of superstition he had clung to it.

Almost as he takes hold of the paper, his brain fails him again—that one concentrated thought has vanished. A groan breaks from him.

Great Heaven! what is this! He is still clutching the pencil in his hand, and now another hand descends upon his. Holds it firmly—compels it to write on the sheets of the paper beneath. The cold of that hand seems to smite to his very heart; he would *have screamed*, but that the power

to do so is refused him. Rapidly —hurriedly—his hand glides on the paper, impelled by that ghostly clutch! Sheet after sheet is filled.

His hand is moving, but without his volition. His brain seems dead. Once he puts out the other hand, waving it frantically to and fro in the darkness, where—something—ought to be—but it cuts the air clean.

And still the other hand works, driven by nimble fingers, until the fifth sheet is full.

Dormer, at the movement that tells him the sheet is to be pushed aside to make room for the sixth, makes a violent effort. He rises from his pillow, and hurls himself forward. His hand is released. He remembers nothing more.

He had fainted, probably. Just now the first dull gleams of light are entering the room. As he

opens his eyes he gazes drearily at them. They are coming in through the shutters. He turns on his side, and wakes gradually to a fuller life. He feels tired—very tired, but—extraordinary this—so much fresher, better altogether. What has happened to that strange dulness that had oppressed him only yesterday and every day from his illness. Tired as he is, he feels as if he could now run a race with many a man. And that dizziness—that brain worry! It is gone too. How clear, how bright he feels.

All at once he remembers. That dream! What a dream it had been. Of course only a dream. He raises himself, looking first at Mary, who is sleeping sweetly, and then, with a laugh, at his own folly, at the table next him.

He turns as white as death.

There, on the table, the five sheets lie closely written over. Hardly daring to breathe, he steps from the bed, and, catching them up, gets inside the curtains, and opens one of the shutters half an inch or so, and gazes at the manuscripts in his hand.

It is not his writing!

A sensation of sickness overcomes him for a moment, his eyes still fixed, he stares down at the papers in his hand, his mind catches the meaning of the story written on them, and his artist soul awakes once more.

It is a grand story—sublime! The merest outline of the plot is given, but he can follow it. Breathlessly, he follows it up to the end of the fifth page.

There it stopped. But, somehow, he knows it. The end—there could be but one end. He

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leans against the half-opened shutter working it out. He feels half mad with joy. Oh, hasten day! come and give him light to begin his task.

It is ten days later. All day and night he had worked at this story until it stood out clear and brilliant. He had folded it.

"I shall take it myself, Mary," said he.

"God go with you!" returned she very softly, her eyes suffused with tears.

And now for six days they have been waiting for an answer. Six days of terrible anxiety. The one good drop in Mary's cup had been that Dick's health had grown steadily towards perfection ever since that dreadful night. He had told her of it, and she to this day persists in the belief that he dreamed it all. Had fallen asleep and written

that plot whilst lying unconscious. And he has let her think it. But he himself knows that it was not so.

Six days with starvation staring you in the face is an eternity. Indeed, this evening, sitting over their miserable fire, hand in hand, despair has so seized upon them that they have no words to give to each other.

Dick takes up the poker in a mechanical, heart-broken sort of way, would have poked the fire, but Mary with a quick movement stops him.

"Don't! It will last longer if you don't stir it."

If she had thought she would not have said it, but hope deferred was mastering her, and now—hearing her own words, and all that it means she gives way entirely and bursts into a passion of tears.

"Mary! Mary!" cries her

husband: what words can describe the anguish in his tone. He catches her to his heart!

It is at this moment that a knock is heard at their door. Both spring to their feet.

"Come in," says Dormer.

The door is opened and an elderly gentleman very sprucely got up, and with an orchid in his button-hole comes forward.

"Mr. Dormer?" asks he.

"Yes," says Dick Dormer, coming forward. "I—You wish to see me——"

"You must let me introduce myself," says the fashionable elderly gentleman, with a beaming smile. "Mrs. Dormer I presume?" with a charming bow to poor Mary, who is trying so to stand that the traces of tears on her cheeks may not be seen. "I am George Benson. *Benson* you know," with another

delightful smile, "of 'The Universal World'?"

Dick's and Mary's hearts stand still. They even forget to offer the great man a chair. The great man, who has been looking round him (though no one would have known it) at the room—the furniture—the carefully concealed poverty everywhere—takes in the situation in its entirety.

"Your story, Mr. Dormer," says he, dropping into a chair next him because he knows they will be terribly upset afterwards when they remember they showed him no courtesy. "I am so enraptured with it! It is beyond praise! So free the style—so—er—enlightened. I really thought I'd like to come round and see you, and tell you myself what I think of it. I like to encourage young authors, when they do show talent."

"You mean, sir, that——"

"That I accept your story for our Christmas number, certainly. But I mean more than that, Mr. Dormer. I hope you will see your way to placing yourself on my staff. I have a vacancy just now—and if you have nothing better in view——"

He breaks off. It seems a little ironical.

Dick's tongue seems cloven to the roof of his mouth. It is Mary after all who speaks. She has seen that Dick ought to speak, but that he cannot. Then she will. Fired with this noble resolution she comes forward.

God knows what words were on her tongue, but all that she says is—

"Oh, Mr. Benson — Mr. Benson!"

The fashionable man has the

kindest heart in the world hidden behind that orchid.

"Never mind; never mind," says he, patting her arm. His tone is a little husky. "I can see, my dear child, quite plainly. Good days first, then bad days, and now," he taps her lightly on the cheek, "good days once again! Good days that will last, I think," nodding his head at Dormer. "In the meantime, can I have a word with you? Good-bye, Mrs. Dormer. My wife will be anxious to call upon you if you will name a day. Good-bye."

Outside, he pulls a bundle of notes out of his pocket and places them in Dormer's hand.

"My dear fellow, on account, the rest later! But—I've known trouble myself, Dormer. Don't be offended, now. Not a word!"

When Dormer gets back he and

Mary fall into each other's arms silently. Not a word is spoken! But, afterwards, when a very lovely fire is burning, and they are toasting their toes at it, and toasting Mr. Benson too, in something else, Mary speaks.

"Was it a ghost, Dick?" says she.

"It was," says Dick. "I couldn't think otherwise. But for all that, Mary, I feel I can take up this position he offers me and not disgrace it."

"I'm sure of that at all events!" says she, bringing down his face to hers. She never could believe in that ghost, it seemed to take away from Dick's talent.

A FALSE CONCLUSION.

UT who are they, my dear Gerald?" says Mrs. Grandcourt, a touch of irritation in her tone as she leans from behind the silver urn to see her son's face.

"My dear mother, if we knew that, we should know everything. Barker"—referring to the lawyer's letter at his elbow—"says they are quite respectable; but, really, so far as I

can see, his only reason for advancing this rash statement lies in the fact that Simpkins and Simpkins told him so."

"And they?"

"Are this young lady's lawyers, I presume."

"I suppose they can't be so very out of the way if they have lawyers at all?" says his mother, brightening; whereat the son laughs.

"Oh! as to that?" says he.

"What I don't like," says Mrs. Grandcourt presently, "is the fact that they are not mother and daughter, or any relation at all to each other. Mr. Barker expressly says that. It sounds as if the young —young person had a companion, who——"

"You mean you think the young person is an actress," says Mr. Grandcourt, indolently. "Well, *the same* thought has suggested

itself to me. But actresses are not necessarily demoralising, and——"

"Yes, I know. And that Dower House has been such a long time on hand," supplements his mother with a sigh. Money of late has not been plentiful with the Grandcourts, and the old name, the old property, so dear to the gentle, fragile woman sitting at the head of her son's table, seem likely to sink deeper and deeper into the tide of debt and depression, until finally the flood shall rise and sweep over them, and drown them altogether. The grand old name! The name her dead husband had given her! If Gerald would only marry some one with rank and money too. Such chances had been given him, but Gerald would take none of them.

"True, thou wisest of women!" says the young man, rising with a

slight smile that has something of sadness in it, and gathering up his letters. "The Dower House must be let, and we are not in a position to be too squeamish about the tenants of it. Let your young person have it by all means for the three months she desires it. The season is over; her engagement at an end no doubt; she could recruit herself in the soft country air before commencing a fresh campaign. The Duenna will accompany her. The glare of the footlights will know her no more until November. This is August, isn't it?"

"Oh, my dear Gerald, what a picture you conjure up!" says poor Mrs. Grandcourt. "An actress—and here, almost within one's gates."

"Nonsense, mother!" stooping over her and kissing her. "What's Hecuba to me, or I to Hecuba? *We* needn't know her. She can

have my house—my other house," laughing, "my garden and my trout stream, but she sha'n't have me!"

Oh, ignorant young man!

. . . .

The trout are shy to-day, or all too knowing, or have been at an alderman's feast in trout-land, because no pretty speckled creature comes to the call of the dainty fly that Grandcourt has cast to them many and many a time since early dawn. It is now ten o'clock, and he, breakfastless, hot, ill-tempered, but filled with a determination to do or die, turns a curve of the river and finds himself——

Face to face with a quite young girl, who looks back at him out of two starry eyes that reflect astonishment but no bashfulness. She has been fishing too, evidently; and not so unsuccessfully as he; she is

indeed, just dropping a handsome trout of half a pound or so into her basket as Grandcourt appears upon the scene. She stands erect as he approaches her with his rod in his hand and his empty basket slung across his shoulder.

A little slow colour creeps into her cheeks as she gazes at him. Such a sweet gaze, and such a sweet face to give it! Is this slight, lovely girl his tenant—the actress?

"This part of the river *does* belong to me, doesn't it?" says she, in a clear tone, that yet is suggestive of doubt. "I am not trespassing, am I?"

"No. I fear it is I who am doing that," says he, "and I must apologise. I am," raising his hat, "speaking to Miss Bland?"

"Yes," says she, after a very perceptible hesitation, and with a *quick blush*

"Hah—changes her name when she leaves town," thinks Grandcourt to himself. "Fights shy of the stage when off the boards; poses as the orthodox English maiden here." Yet he knows he lies to himself as he thinks this. Anything more unlike posing, than the attitude of this frank unembarrassed girl, who is standing before him, could not be imagined.

"And you?" says she, "Am I speaking to my landlord?" She smiles as she asks this.

"To that fortunate person," returns he, smiling too. She is so pretty that he forgets a good many things, and lets himself slide into quite a friendly air with her; can it be possible she has been here for three weeks! Three weeks in near proximity to him, and never until now to meet her.

"You have been from home?"

says she suddenly, in a gentle interrogative manner; breaking in upon his soliloquy.

"No," says he, rashly.

"Oh! I thought you had been, because—because I had not seen you fishing anywhere on this river until to-day."

He can see, however, that the second "because" is not the real one. Good heavens! had she supposed he would call? Had she perhaps, hoped through him, to get introductions to the county. She ought to be made to understand at once, that though he has been willing to let her have his house for the autumn, it does not at all follow that he is prepared to acknowledge her as an equal in any way. But how to make her understand. Instead of the dignified speech he feels he should now deliver, he is *conscious* only of the hot crimson

mounting to his brow, and of a miserable knowledge that he doesn't in the least know what he is going to say next.

He is so distinctly embarrassed that she gazes at him with some surprise. And he, watching her, grows positive that she has grasped his secret meaning. What a prig she must think him! Yet to call without his mother would be an impertinence, and to ask his mother to call upon an actress of unknown antecedents would be a greater impertinence still. Will she be angry? Take it in bad part? To his astonishment as the truth dawns upon her, her lips widen, a great gleam shoots into her eyes. After one long struggle with herself she bursts out laughing! *Laughing!* A sense of injury, of offence, brings a quick flush to Mr. Grandcourt's face. He frowns slightly.

Jove when he frowned shook the Heavens! But Miss Bland is so far unimpressed by Grandcourt's frown, that her laugh grows into a ladylike, but most decided little shout.

"Oh! I'm so sorry," says she presently, wiping her eyes. "But a thought struck me at that moment. An absurd thought; and it led me astray. Thoughts *will* do that sometimes, won't they? Yes?" with a delicious little glance at him. "And so you are always busy; today especially so, as I can see. Have you had good sport?"

"Nothing," says he, rather stiffly, with a glance at his empty basket.

"How disheartening! I have been more fortunate than that. See!" She lifts the lid of her basket, and shows a good half dozen of the desired beauties lying within

it. "I am going back to breakfast," says she. "I shall have them fried. Mum—Mrs. Marks likes trout."

"And late hours apparently," says he. "It is ten o'clock."

"Well, she doesn't like late hours," says the girl, contritely. "But I do when I go fishing, and so I always see that she has a cup of tea and something or other at seven on those warlike occasions. You have breakfasted of course?"

"No," winding up his reel. "But I'm better to my mother than you are to—Mrs. Marks." He was very near saying "yours." In his own mind he has no doubt at all but that the trout-loving Mrs. Marks is the mother of this lovely girl. "I didn't ask her to wait for me. She will have forgotten her breakfast by the time I get back to the court."

"Four miles from this, isn't it?" sympathetically.

"Quite that, even by the shortest route."

"And hungry all the way?" Her tone has grown quite plaintive now.

"Starving!" says he, laughing.

"Don't do it," says she, earnestly. "Come home with me. Mrs. Marks will give you something to eat. I shall feel as if we had been horribly inhospitable if you go away from our very hall door starving."

She looks up at him, with so open, so sweet, so generous a glance that Grandcourt goes down before it. He hesitates, and consequently is lost. She picks up her basket and Gerald follows her to her home.

If he had been speculating on the trout as the *pièce de résistance*, he is mightily mistaken. Little delica*cies, trivial* but costly, are dotted all

over the breakfast table. There is no mistake about the *cook!* The Grandcourts of late years have not been accustomed to the subdued, but undoubtedly reckless extravagance, that marks every feature of the Dower House, and Gerald noting each sign of wealth, from the soft carpet into which the foot sinks with noiseless tread, to the game pie, which is a dream for any gourmand, and from that to the silver urn, of shape and age to make a collector long to steal it, is conscious of some surprise.

But with all these is Mrs. Marks! A dear old woman—a really almost delightful old woman, but not—er —*you* know—not quite what one is accustomed to. Not an H, to speak of, and a fat laugh. It is wonderful how superior a girl can be to her mother. And how she has assimilated herself to her surroundings—

the girl that is—*not* the mother. But then these actresses! What is it they *can't* do?

. . . .

It is three weeks later. And though Grandcourt has fished up and down that part of the river for trout, and fished too, with unflagging energy for a second invitation to breakfast—he has never caught it.

Miss Bland, however, he has seen very often; and not always with rod in hand. There have been days when he met her wandering far afield, searching for flowers, or else sitting in shady places engrossed in a book. At first he had given himself up somewhat unconsciously to the delight of seeing her; then, as the truth slowly dawned upon him that he loved her, a passionate revulsion of feeling had *set in*, and he swore to himself that

whatever it might cost him he would not break his mother's heart, or lower the good old name by marrying a girl who——. Who was she?

He kept away from her for the six longest days that he had ever known: and now his resolution fails him, and as he hurries towards her across the grass to where, in the little nook of the sweet meadow he can see her sitting, bending over a volume, his heart beats with so wild, so fierce an exultation that he knows the end has come, and that he is hers alone, soul and body, for now and for always—actress though she be.

As she looks up at him it strikes him she is very pale; and that there are deep purple shadows beneath her eyes. Her soft mouth has taken a mournful droop, but as her gaze meets his, and as she reads in his

face some strange change—a light that was not in it, surely, when last they parted—her whole expression alters; the pallor gives way to a brilliant flush, and a happy laugh parts her lips.

"You have come," cried she, joyously. "I thought you had tired of the country and gone to Norway, or some of those other horrid places that men fancy nowadays."

"I have not tired of the country," says he, in a low tone; "And you?"

"I am a worshipper of the green fields and lanes," says she, gently. "I *never* change. Do not hope for alteration in me on that score."

"Does that mean that I may look for it somewhere else?" says he, regarding her keenly. There is a good deal of sorrow in his gaze. He has given up the struggle, but *it still* seems bitter to him to put

this girl in the place his mother has held.

"For alteration?"

He pauses: and his eyes wander from hers, as though he has lost himself somewhat in his own thoughts; some words break from him—a quotation—

"Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds."

"That is true," says he, quickly, as if in answer to those last troublesome thoughts of his: and then—"well—and so you like the country."

"Like is a poor word—I love it."

"It must be a change for you?" says he.

"The one *great* change. Town, though in a sense amusing, has few charms for me. I find it fatiguing. The lights, the sound, the ceaseless rush—;" she looks at him and

laughs. "I suppose I am ungrateful," says she. "They tell me I was very well received, but in reality I was glad when the season was over, and I could fly away to hide myself here." She leans forward—"*That* is a secret remember."

"I know. I shall tell no one of your present abode. And so you were a great success?"

"They said so," indifferently. "But I didn't care about it."

"Yet you will go back to it again?"

"Well, I'm bound to do that. Though in my heart I wish I weren't," says she, softly, looking up at him with lovely clear grey eyes. "But when one has promised—made a regular engagement—it is difficult to get out of it, isn't it?"

"*I* don't see that," quickly.

"Managers have been squared before now."

"Managers!" She turns upon him a glance full of the strongest amazement. Good heavens! What an actress the girl is, both on and off the stage!

"Oh! Did you think I had not guessed," says he, with a touch of passion. "From the very first I seemed to know it—and afterwards—— But I wish you had been open with me. You might have told me. It would have been better than to let me find it out for myself."

"And so you have found out that I—*I*—am an actress?" says she. There is so much agitation in her tone that he feels a terrible pity for her. With her secret disclosed at last—laid bare—what must her feelings be!

"Don't take it like that," says

he. "It can make no difference now. I love you as I never have loved, as I never shall love another woman. You," he pauses, and then goes on deliberately, "will marry me?"

"Oh! stay, stay," says she, pushing him from her. They have both risen, and both are very pale. "Think—knowing me an actress, you still ask me to be your wife."

"Yes," says he. Once again that sadness rings through his tone.

"You are willing to sacrifice everything; your social standing, your chance of raising the old name to its old standing—all for me?"

"Yes," says he, again.

"Yet you are sorry about it," says she, tears rising to her eyes.

"I am," says Grandcourt, steadily—defiantly, almost. "Think as you will of *that*, I will never de*ceive you.* It will be a death blow

to my mother that I should give her a daughter from——"

"The footlights!" interposes she, quickly. "I see. *That* was why she never called. Well!" She draws up her slender figure, and a long, *long* sigh escapes her. She looks at him suddenly. "That, too, was why you have kept away from me for six days. You were counting the cost?"

"You need not make it too hard for me," says he, reproachfully. "Is a man to be despised because he dwells long on the one great throw of his life? Answer me now. You *will* marry me?"

He has taken her hands, and tries to draw her to him. But very gently, yet decidedly, she repulses him.

"I must think of it," says she. "Not *now*. Can I give you an answer this evening——, will you come down this evening?"

"Don t talk to me like that," says he, sharply.

"You *will* come then. Very good." She holds out her hand to him to bid him farewell.

"To go like this! Give me some *little* hope," urges he, detaining her.

"The best hope I could give you would be that we should never meet again."

"Don't say that——" he tightens his grasp on hers. "Do you know," says he, "that I have never yet heard your christian name. Tell it to me."

"Amanda!"

"Yes, but your *real* one," says he. ("*Amanda*!" How it savours of the bills, the posters!)

"It *is* my real one, believe it or not as you will," says Miss Bland, who now for the first time betrays *an inclination* to give way to mirth.

"As you will of course," says Grandcourt. He is a little offended. Even supposing her name to be Maria, he would have accepted it cheerfully, but this determination to refuse him confidence is irritating to him. "Good-bye."

"Good-bye," says Miss Bland, discreetly drawing back as he makes a movement towards her.

"I shall see you this evening?" says he, eagerly.

"Yes. Any hour after seven," Is there a suspicion of malice in her soft glance?

. . . .

Seven o'clock is chiming from the ormolu ornament on the mantel-piece of the Dower House as he approaches it later on in the evening of this eventful day. The windows lie close to the ground. Up to this he has always made his exits and entrances by these

French windows, and now as he is in the act of stepping through them to the drawing-room beyond, his step is arrested by the sound of a voice he knows.

"Well, I do hope you are tired of this masquerading," says somebody in a lively tone. Surely the possessor of that lively tone can be nobody but Lady Olivia Scarbanks. "For a girl who has had all London at her feet for three months, a girl with rank, and money, too (an unheard-of combination in these modern times), to decide on burying herself alive in such savage regions as these is almost more than the human mind can grasp."

"I've liked it," says somebody else, and undoubtedly it is the actress who is speaking this time. "I was so bored by—— Ah! Mr. Grandcourt. How d'ye do?

Let me introduce you to my aunt, Lady Olivia Scarbanks."

"We have met before," says Lady Olivia, giving the young man, who seems rather unequal to conversation at this moment, a warm reception. He is, indeed, overcome by the manner of the younger lady. Had she planned this revenge, and is she really not —not what he had thought her, but——

His soul sinks within him.

"And my niece Lady Amanda has been telling me," goes on Lady Olivia, blandly, "that you have been so good to her. Have helped so effectually to destroy the monotony of the country: I feel I ought to be grateful for that, but I am not."

"Lady Amanda?" says Grandcourt, feeling stunned.

"Lady Amanda Beaudesert. Has

she not even confided in you, the naughty girl? The fact is, Mr. Grandcourt, my niece is a spoiled child. All the world bowed down to her last season, and she flung it aside, and after breaking a dozen hearts or so decided on hiding herself away in some remote spot where she was unknown, and where this tiresome world could not follow her. She wanted me to go into exile with her, but I declined. So she took her old nurse, Mrs. Marks—her 'Mumpsey,' as she calls her—with her, and has been vegetating on your property for quite seven weeks."

Grandcourt turns passionate eyes on the girl, who stands motionless, her own eyes fixed immovably upon the carpet.

"I call it disgraceful!" goes on Lady Olivia, laughing. "Everybody asking where she is, and I, *her* poor old aunt, forbidden to say

where. You see she had been bred in the country, and had a hankering to go back to it so strong that all the enticements of town could not quell it. But then, why not to one of her own country seats! Three of them, I assure you, dear Mr. Grandcourt, yet she would elect to borrow, or beg, or steal a house somewhere else."

"It was a cruel mistake," says Grandcourt, in a stifled tone, "Lady Amanda Beaudesert!" Even in this remote country place he had read in all the papers of that charming person's successes; the description of her gowns at this party; of her presentation to Her Majesty; of her enormous fortune, her long descent; her beauty, that stood alone—unrivalled amongst the mass of *débutantes* who thronged the season during the months of June and July. And he, he had treated

her as though——. The hot blood surges to his brow.

"It has been a little comedy," says he to Lady Olivia; "I am glad to have witnessed it. I will not longer disturb your meeting with your niece. Good-bye." He gives his hand to Lady Olivia, who is very cordial, and pausing before "Amanda, the false"——makes her a slight bow. For a moment their eyes meet. In his the girl reads something that speaks of an eternal farewell.

He has passed on, the hateful door has closed behind him. If she lets him go now, she will never see him again. This cruel certainty lends wings to her thought, and her actions.

"Auntie! a moment," says she, sharply. "I had a message for Mr. Grandcourt. I must deliver *it*. Stay here, I shall be back in

no time." She springs through the window and running rapidly across the short grass, comes up with Grandcourt just as he reaches the entrance gate.

She is panting from her quick run, her hair is flying wild, her eyes are alight, never before perhaps has she looked so lovely.

"What did you mean by going away like that?" cries she, motioning him to follow her into a side path. "Have you forgotten——"

"That will do," says he, violently. "Have you not played with me enough? Have I not acted the fool to perfection. There is but one thing left for me, Lady Amanda, to beg your pardon, and rid you of my presence."

"Oh no, don't go! Don't, don't, don't. I was wrong I know, but —Gerald!" It is the first time she has called him by his Christian

name, and Mr. Grandcourt's heart begins to beat with a fierceness that is most painful.

"Why should I not go?" says he. "After all that has passed between us, do you think I should have the impertinence to—to—. There! have some pity; let me go without further indignity."

"If you go," cries she, standing back from him and looking fairly into his eyes, "you will break my heart!"

"Amanda!"

"Yes. I don't care what you think. You said you were willing to marry me when you thought I was only—only—an actress; are you less willing to marry me now, when you know me to be what I am? Oh, you should not have stolen my heart all these weeks if you only meant to throw me over *at last.*"

"Oh, darling, darling——"

"Well, what is the good of your calling me that if you won't make friends with me? Gerald, do, *do* love me as you loved me this morning."

Unconsciously she moves towards him, her charming face troubled and sad with tears, uplifted to his. Who could resist it? Not Mr. Grandcourt evidently. Another moment and she is lying in his arms, her slender form crushed against his heart.

A HASTY JUDGMENT.

FTER all, Digby, you are more forgiving than I thought you," says Major Carlton, coming up to where Digby Vere is standing, beside a heavy velvet portière that hides a recess beyond. A waltz has just begun, and Vere has the expression of one who is looking among the dancers for some one particular person.

"How so?" asks he, smiling. He is a specially good-looking *young* man of about twenty-nine,

and the smart Lancer uniform he is wearing seems to suit him.

"Why, I've just heard from Waring that you have been Miss Gascoigne's devoted slave for the past three weeks."

"Slave—well, as for that——I confess, however, that I—like her."

"'Twill serve," says Carlton, laughing. "And so you have forgotten the past, then. You have condoned her sin, and all those dark threats of vengeance you used to breathe in India are so much—vapour! I thought you were never going to forgive her scandalous treatment of your cousin—Sir Charles."

"What do you mean?" exclaims Vere, wheeling round to look at him more intently. "Who are you talking about? The woman who wrecked Charles Vere's life was called Florence Grant!"

"And is now called Florence Gascoigne."

Vere bursts out laughing; there is terrible relief in the laughter.

"My dear fellow, you have got into a muddle of some sort. Miss Gascoigne is Miss Gascoigne; she is not married."

"I know she isn't. But she has changed her name for all that. Only a year ago she was still Florence Grant, but a distant relation died, leaving her all her money on consideration that she changed her name to Gascoigne. See!"

There is a dead silence for a full minute; then—

"There must be many Gascoignes," says Vere, in a low tone. His eyes search Carlton's as though imploring him to support him in this opinion. Carlton is shocked at the change in his face.

"Look here, Vere. I'm awfully sorry. I'd have cut my tongue out if I had only known. But," stammering, "I had no idea you were so hard hit—and besides, lots of girls do that sort of thing, you know—fling a fellow over, and——"

At this moment there is a slight rustle behind the velvet curtain, as though some one has entered the little room behind, and seated him or herself upon a lounge. Both men, however, are too agitated to notice it.

"But not with the cold brutality that was practised by Miss Gascoigne," says Vere, in a stern, hard tone. "Miss Grant, rather! If what you say is true, no wonder she was glad of the chance of putting that name behind her. It is useless any one's defending her, Carlton, because I had the whole story from his own lips a month

before he died. She deliberately led him on until he was half mad with love for her, and then, a richer man appearing, she calmly, without a kindly word, flung him over. She broke his heart. He said so."

There is another sound behind the curtain now, as though a fan has fallen with a little crash to the floor.

"By Jove!" says Carlton, who is now wishing himself well out of it, "he didn't look like a fellow whose heart would be easily broken; he seemed to get a good deal of good out of that little flirtation with the Colonel's wife up in the Hills. I," awkwardly, "I shouldn't think so much about it if I were you, Digby. If you fancy her as much as you say, I'd just put that old story in my pocket and go in and *win*, *if* she would have me!"

"Never!" says Vere, with sudden violence, suppressed indeed, but perhaps the more terrible for that. "I—I—to cast a thought on a heartless coquette like that. I swore in India that I would seek her out, and upbraid her with her conduct to Charles; try to wring a passing pang from her cold heart; but now, Carlton, I confess that is beyond me. She was dear to me—I never knew how dear until this moment, when I—know I shall never willingly look upon her face again. It is all over, that dead dream! Her face may be like heaven, but her soul—her soul must be like hell! Though it cost me all the happiness of my life, I shall cast her out of my heart."

"You will give her an opportunity to explain it. Since it has gone thus far with you—for your

own sake, dear boy—do give her a chance of saying how it was."

"No. A woman like that! Do you think she has not words at her command wherewith to twist and turn her phrases, and show herself the injured innocent? I refuse to listen to her exculpation. I refuse to listen to one word that she could say. There, let us forget all this," turning a ghastly face to Carlton, but conjuring up a smile all the same. "What about these races; you are riding?"

"No, but I hear you have the choice of two mounts. I'm glad you are going to have nothing to do with Younge's Firewater—a dangerous brute. Waring is mad for you to ride his mare, and he says you have almost promised."

"Tell Waring, if you see him again to-night, that I have changed

my mind, however. I shall ride Firewater for Younge."

"Oh, I say, Vere, I wouldn't if I were you. A beast like that, that has killed his man already. I——"

"I shall ride him," says Vere, impatiently. "He'll win if I can only manage him. And besides—what does it matter?"

"It would matter a lot to the regiment if anything happened to you, old boy," says the Major, almost affectionately. "There's Waring over there. I'll go and talk to him. He may persuade you."

Carlton is hardly gone when the velvet portière behind Vere is swept aside by an imperious hand, and a girl, tall, graceful, beautiful, with flashing eyes, and a face as white as death, confronts Vere.

"Come in here," commands she,

beckoning him with a little royal gesture of her hand.

He follows her. She drops the curtain. And in this small, dainty perfumed corner of the house they are virtually alone.

"So!" says she, in a voice low and soft, yet trembling with passion, "you had decided on giving me no chance of explaining myself. You were bent on refusing to listen to my exculpation! You were prepared to treat me as the dust beneath your feet—you"—vehemently—"you—who only last night thought me worthy to be your wife."

"Ah!" says he, as if stung to the quick, "last night."

"But you shall hear me," cries she, her beautiful eyes on fire, her slight figure swaying, as if her anger is consuming her. "I will *not* be treated thus by you. You

shall stand there," with a tragic gesture of her hand, "there—before me—until you hear the truth. It is not a vindication you shall hear—I do not care to justify myself in your sight—a man who would condemn a woman unheard. It is the truth of your cousin's story that I shall lay bare to you, and then, when"—she draws back her hand and lays it on her breast, as though to still its throbbings—"when you have learned that my soul is not like hell—when you have seen me as I am, the injured, not the injurer—then——" she pauses, a great light flashes over her face, "then I shall refuse to listen to you!"

She takes a step forward.

"Your cousin, Sir Charles Vere, asked me to marry him two years ago. I was very young then—a mere child. I did not like him,

but they—my people—persuaded me to accept him. I was portionless, and a title always counts. As I said, I was a child; we were engaged. He came often to see us in the beginning of our engagement, as often as is usual, but towards the close of it he came nearly every day, sometimes twice a day. I wondered at this, because his manner was in nowise different to me—it was kind—but I thought it was a little less loverlike than before. Still he came every day, and sometimes twice and three times a day. Several times it occurred to me as odd that he called at the house when he must have known I was driving in the park with my married sister. I—" she pauses, and a quick breath parts her lips, "have another sister, a little girl, and she at that time had a governess, a young lady, as young

as myself. She was very pretty—far, far prettier than I was! One day, coming back much earlier from my drive with Gertrude than was usual with me, I went straight to the schoolroom to see Mimi, my little sister. I did not find her there; but I found your cousin—Sir Charles, and Miss——. No, I shall not mention her name. There was a screen half across one corner of the room, and they sat hidden behind it. Only half hidden. They had not been very careful, you see, as they thought I was quite sure not to return till six o'clock. They did not see me. He was sitting beside her, with his arm round her —and her head was—— Oh!" with quick disgust, "I need not go into that.

"I said nothing. I went away. He was dining with us that evening, but I said I had a bad headache, and *did* not come down.

"The next day my sister's governess was gone. They made many inquiries about her, but I said nothing. Sir Charles came and went as usual, but my headache still clung to me. I would not see him. At last I took courage—I went down. He was in the library. He came to me, and would have kissed me, but I thrust him back.

"'Where is Minnie?' I asked. That was the girl's name.

"I shall never forget his face. He recovered himself—but it was too late.

"'What should I know of her?' said he.

"'Coward!' I cried, and left him. My engagement ended that day.

"Seven months afterwards I had a letter from her. I went to her; she was dying. She told me all; she showed me his letters. She

gave them to me. If you wish to see them," this contemptuously, "you can! I wrote to him at her request under a feigned name. He was then in India, and it took some time to get the answer. When it did come she was dead. But—you can see that answer too."

"I don't want to see it," says Vere, hoarsely.

"Still, you shall," with cold determination. "I shall post all those letters to your quarters to-morrow. It," proudly, "pleases me to do so. Well, she died. I saw that she was properly buried. I had come into some money then, and was more or less my own mistress. I suppose he heard of the money, because he wrote again. He denied everything about Miss—— about Minnie. He did not know I had the letters. I answered, refusing him. I did not explain. I could not. He"—she

pauses, her hands clenched together —"he, you say, died, declaring I had been false to him."

There is silence again.

"Speak," cries she, passionately; "he said that?"

"Yes—and——" He hesitates. Terrible as all the foregoing has been to him, there has still been balm in it, but there remains something that seems more to be desired now than anything else on earth.

"What more?"

"He said you had given him up to marry another—richer man."

"Must I answer that?" says she, wearily; "is not all this enough? Well, it was but another lie. There was no other man. Now go!"

"Florence," says he, falling at her feet, and catching a fold of her dress, "have mercy. I was mad. *I know* it. But—it was madness

born of my love for you! Hear me! pity me!"

"No!" The word rings out right royally. She looks like a queen standing above him in her exquisite robe of clinging silk, and with the diamonds flashing on her neck and brow. "As you would have behaved towards me, so I behave towards you now." She points to the door. "Go."

. . . .

There is quite a gay scene on the impromptu grand stand, though these races are a thing got up in a night as it were, as a merely local amusement. Every one's thoughts are for Sir Digby Vere, who has elected to ride that well-known misdemeanant, Firewater, against the advice of all his friends. They have started by this, and are well over the first hurdle, Captain Waring's mare—a plucky, little

thing—leading by three or four heads. The second hurdle is past now, and some one in the grand stand says that Firewater is gaining ground. Florence Gascoigne, who is leaning over the ledge of the balcony, gives a start, and putting her glasses to her eyes, scans the scene beyond. Yes, beyond all doubt, Firewater is overtaking the others. Slowly—slowly he is creeping up.

And now—now—they are at the stone wall. Firewater refuses it—there is a second's pause—a short, low terrible cry from Florence, heard only by her sister, who lays her hand in warning on her arm; and now Firewater is over it, his rider still upon his back. After that all stands out in a little mist before Miss Gascoigne's eyes, and it is not until now, as they sweep *round* the corner, and are tearing

towards the water jump, that her senses quite return to her. She sees now! She throws up her head; the light returns to her eyes. He is leading. Firewater is a good length beyond all the others. He is racing madly for the water jump. Vere lifts her well; she rises to it —she is over!

Over! What is this? What is this sickening heap upon the ground? The horse—one can see the horse; but the man——. Somebody carries Miss Gascoigne fainting out of the stand.

. . . .

She is kneeling beside his bed. They had given her permission to enter a while ago. He had been restored to consciousness last night, and had spent each hour since—at intervals—asking for her, demanding her. The doctor had at last said that she must be brought to

him if they wished to hold him back even for a little while from the land of death. Mrs. Margrove, her married sister, had brought her, but outside his door she had begged piteously to see him alone, and even the doctor had not the heart to refuse her.

"You have come," says Vere, softly, faintly. For all answer she lays her cheek against his hand.

"I—wronged you."

"Oh, no—no—no," cries she, "you shall not reproach yourself. And what is your sin to mine, Digby? You condemned me unheard, I know—but I—I heard you say you were going to ride that"—with a shudder—"that awful horse, and yet," bursting into tears, "I said nothing to dissuade you. Oh! it was not that I did not love you, Digby—only—only—I *thought*——"

"I know! you could not bear to lower your pride!" says he. "My darling, don't cry like that. I could not bear to lower my pride, either; I said, do you remember, to Carlton, that I would not hear an explanation from you. But I——"

"Oh! it wasn't that," says she, lifting her head, and looking at him through lovely tear-stained eyes. "It wasn't pride of that sort. My pride was that I was sure you would win, that you would conquer Fire-water. If"—hurriedly—"if I had thought there was any real danger for you I—I would have gone to you, to dissuade you from riding him, even if I had to run into the mess-room before them all."

In spite of his weakness he laughs a little at this. He holds out his feeble arms to her. She creeps into them.

"Now I shall get well," says he, smiling at her a faint but radiant smile.

"There is, however, one thing I don't forgive," says she, her old happy self coming back to her again. She is laughing a little, sitting on the chair by his bedside, and holding his hand.

"And that, my own?"

"That you didn't win that race. I was so longing to see you come in at the head of them all."

"Never mind. I have won something else — something far better—the best in all the world." He draws her to him again. "I have won you," says he.

LADY BLACKMORE'S DELIVERANCE.

"I TELL you, you shall do as I desire you! You will sit down and write that invitation at once."

"You make a mistake. I shall certainly not invite Lord Legley to my house. I refuse to receive him — to allow him to be in the house with my children and my personal friends."

"And I tell you you shall invite

him. Your children! Are they not my children as well? I shall take care they are not brought up young prigs! As for your friends, I presume they all know Legley?"

"Oh! I think not," said she, with a pale smile. She was sitting in the library where coffee had been served after dinner, and with one hand was pretending to stir the sugar in her cup: the other was supporting her beautiful head, and the lace of her sleeve having fallen back, her soft rounded arm showed white in the lamplight.

"What do you mean by that?" demanded Blackmore, furiously. "That they consider themselves too good for him? And for me too, no doubt."

"I am quite sure there is not one of my particular friends who would consent to remain for a single moment in the room with Lord

Legley," said she, firmly. She raised her face, now cold and stern, and looked him straight in the face.

"They must be —— particular then," said he, coarsely, "and far too fine for me. I'll make a clean sweep of them after this affair. In the meantime, I feel anxious to make an experiment—to see if your friends are as virtuous as you imagine them." As he spoke he went up to her, and laid his hand upon her arm, his face, always broad and red, was now inflamed, and he lurched a little as he reached her. "Go over there and write that invitation to Legley without delay."

"Never!" said she. She rose, shaking off his hand as she did so. There was something so strong, so grave in her young face that he shrank back a step or two. "How *dare* you ask me to invite to my

house a man of Legley's reputation. A swindler, a roue—a——. One's lips," indignantly, "refuse to describe him! Even if I were to so far forget myself as to receive him myself, I should certainly not have the hardihood to present him to my friends."

"Your friends," said he. A villainous smile woke in his face. "How many have you? Paul Wingfield is one—but how many more are there?"

His covert meaning, his whole expression is replete with insult. At his allusion to her cousin, Lady Blackmore paled slightly, but did not for a second lower her eyes before his.

"I was hardly alluding to Paul, or to my other men friends," said she, steadily. "I was thinking of the girls I have invited for this grouse shooting. I should not

dream of subjecting young creatures to the gross insolence of Lord Legley."

"You seem to know a good deal about him."

"I know him only through you; you introduced me to him."

"Well—what of that——?"

"Nothing!" with dignity.

She paused and then said, quietly, "If you wish to entertain Lord Legley, invite him to your shooting lodge in Scotland—do not abuse the privileges of your home by asking him here."

"You think to conquer me!" said he, darkly. "But you make a mistake. Come, —— you, write that note at once——"

"I have already told you that I will not," said Lady Blackmore, coldly.

"By heaven, I'll show you that *I'm* the master here," said he—he

took a step towards her, but even as he did so the door was thrown open, and a girl entered the room.

She was tall, and very dark. She was not beautiful, but she was very handsome, and her eyes were the more fascinating in that it was hard to read them. She was Lady Blackmore's governess—the governess she had engaged a month ago for her two children: Leo, a child of seven, and Ethel, who was just five—the little one's last birthday had occurred a month ago.

Miss Ranitch went up to Lady Blackmore, and held out to her a little brass button.

"Ethel told me to give you that," she said. Her voice was quite English, so was her whole manner, yet she had a good deal of Russian blood in her veins. "She said you were to keep it, so that you would

remember to come and say good-night to her."

"When do I forget?" said Lady Blackmore. She regarded the governess with some coldness. "If you are going upstairs again, please tell her I have received her little token."

She had taken the brass button from the governess with seeming coldness, but now she held it tightly within her hand as though she was clinging to it with all her strength. Her little one—her darling! Why had she thought she could forget.—Had this woman——

She raised her eyes suddenly to look at the governess, and intercepted a glance from that dark young woman directed to her husband. There was meaning in it. It seemed to Lady Blackmore that the governess was reminding *her* husband of something—some

promise, perhaps. She drew in her breath a little sharply. But after all it did not come to her as a surprise, she had noticed various things lately. And— Well—she was accustomed to it! Five years ago—before the birth of her little daughter she had learned the worthlessness of the man she had married.

"Take my message to Ethel," said she, imperiously—and the governess at once retired.

Helena Blackmore waited a few moments as if expecting her husband to renew the dispute, that had been in full swing up to the arrival of Miss Ranitch—but apparently he had now forgotten it. He had seated himself on a lounge, and was leaning forward, his forehead on his hand as if thinking. Lady Blackmore moved towards the door, but before she reached it he looked up.

"A moment!" said he. His

tone was quite changed—it was gentle now, even deprecatory. Helena, wondering, stood still. What did this mean?

"I am afraid I was rather rude to you a while ago," said he, smiling. His smile was always a terror to her. "But we won't say anything more about Legley. After all, I daresay he is not quite respectable. There! I give in. Come now. You must allow that's a sign of grace."

He came towards her—a little unsteady—with his hands outheld, but Lady Blackmore busied herself with her fan and did not see them.

"If I do something for you—you'll do something for me—won't you?" said Blackmore, with what he fondly believed to be an irresistibly insinuating air. "And do you know that poor devil of a governess,—I've noticed her lately,

and she seems to be down on her luck. A little girl like that—don't you know—born of good people and that—must feel it beastly being stuck up in a schoolroom all day long, without getting a chance of conversing with her equals. I say, don't you think we might give her a show, eh? Ask her down to dinner, you know, eh?"

He was always vulgar, but he was particularly so at this moment. Lady Blackmore's lip curled. If he had not been considerably the worse for the champagne he had taken at dinner, he would hardly have dared to make this request.

"Not with ourselves alone, you know. But, to-morrow, we'll have people here, and it would be a real kindness to give the poor girl an hour or two's amusement."

"First Lord Legley, and now my governess. I fail to understand

you," said Lady Blackmore. "I engaged Miss Ranitch to educate my children, not to entertain my guests."

"You refuse then—refuse again!' His brow darkened. "I tell you I'll have her invited—and Legley too for all that. Sit down there and write." He caught her and tried to drag her towards a writing-table. She resisted passionately, and he laid his hand upon her throat in a sudden access of fury, and pushed her against the wall. She was tall and strong, and exquisitely moulded, and might therefore still have resisted him, but that he had her wrist in his grasp, and in some way bent it backwards. A sharp cry escaped her!

At that moment footsteps outside could be heard; and presently a voice. The voice belonged to Paul Wingfield. Blackmore, who had a wholesome dread of his wife's

cousin, sped incontinently from the room through a door that led to a passage beyond.

Helena, with the quick desire of a woman to save appearances at all costs, forgot the pain her wrist was causing her, and hurrying to a chair flung herself into it and pretended to be reading a paper as her cousin entered the room. She had one last regret that she had not been able to lower the lamp. She was afraid of what her face would surely betray. She knew she was as white as death and she could not control her heavy, hurried breathing. That clasp upon her throat had been suffocating.

"You, Paul," said she, looking up, and managing a smile with an effort.

"Yes ; I ran over (he lived about five miles away) to tell you that I sha'n't be able to come to-morrow."

"No?" Her voice sank—her heart died within her. She had so depended upon him to help her with her guests during this ensuing week—to keep her husband in order! Blackmore was in a degree afraid of him, and was generally civil, and drank a good deal less than he usually did when Paul was staying in the house. She paused. "You—is it something important?" she asked.

"Well, Treadall has just telegraphed to say he must see me to-morrow about those leases; it will take quite a day to look them over and see the tenants. I thought I'd come and tell you."

"It was good of you!" Her eyes were downcast. The tears indeed were rising in them, and she feared lest they might be seen. All the world seemed slipping from her! *She* was tied for life to a very brute,

the woman she had chosen as companion for her children was a traitor, and now Paul was deserting her. She did her best to restrain her tears, but she was overstrung through her late hideous encounter with her husband, and feeling that in another moment they would overflow, she rose abruptly and went over to one of the windows.

Wingfield followed her. His heart was too full of her not to know that there was trouble in her air.

"What is it?" asked he. As he came near she pulled one of the blinds aside, holding it against her face, and so hid herself under pretence of looking at the night.

"Nothing really." She controlled her voice with difficulty. "Only —if you could put off this visit of your attorney—for a few days—I——"

She stopped. She felt she could not go on.

"If it is a matter of consequence to you, of course I shall make a point of doing it," said Wingfield. "You know there are few things I would not do for you, Helena." He spoke quite calmly, and as he did so, he put out his hand and took hers. It was a perfectly kind and usual action, but as his hand touched her wrist, a little sharp agonised cry escaped her.

"Oh, don't! It hurts!" cried she, involuntarily.

"What hurts?" He drew her back with a sort of authority in his air into the full light of the room, and there examined her wrist. It was already swollen, and was turning a little black.

"How did this happen?" demanded he.

"*I*"—began she faintly—she was

not an adept at lying. "I—it was a twist—I——"

"Don't go on," said he, sternly. "Don't lie to me for him! Do you think"—he let her go, and stood back, his face set, and his dark eyes flashing—"I have not seen for a long time—have not known the life you lead. And now——" He stopped as if choking. "Now it has come to this—" he pointed to her poor swollen wrist—"that he —— Oh, the damnable coward!" cried he.

"Oh! hush! Oh, hush!" entreated she, wildly. In her anxiety lest her husband might be near, and might listen (she understood him to quite a terrible extent) she raised the hurt arm, and again a faint cry came from her. Somehow the pain seemed worse this time, and suddenly she burst into tears—wild tears, passionate, and full of despair.

Her life! What was her life now? What could it ever be? Failure was writ large all over it. And it might have been so different! Oh, if there had been only some one to guide her in her early days —some one to stand between her and her marriage.

She felt now—she knew—that Paul loved her. And she—alas! alas! she loved him too. Why had she not waited! Why had she allowed herself, whilst still almost a child, to be hurried into a marriage with the brute whose name she bore!

"Helena!" Wingfield's voice broke upon her ear. She rose and turned to him wildly.

"I can bear it no longer!" cried she, fiercely. "I have borne too much already. I must speak to some one or go mad. All day long *I live* in a state of misery—all day

long I endure insults, beneath which every woman, I know, would rebel —but it has come to a climax now! To-night he desired me to ask Lord Legley to meet my guests, and——"

"Impossible!" from Wingfield, but she waved his interruption aside.

"And after that almost openly avowed his admiration for my children's governess."

"For—for," stammered Wingfield.

"Miss Ranitch!" She drew herself up with a superb air. "You doubt me perhaps; yet when I refused to receive her to-morrow night at dinner—a dinner to which my friends have been invited—he——" she paused and shrank a little. Wingfield went to her.

"What, Helena?"

"He caught me by the throat,"

said she, in a low, fierce tone, "and pushed me back there," pointing to the wall behind him, "and held me until breath was hardly left me. . . . Then you came."

She sank into a chair and bowed her lovely head upon the table. Again violent weeping overcame her, and a moment afterwards she found herself within his arms. She yielded for a second. It was so sweet to know him hers; and then made an effort to release herself.

"Hear me, Helena," entreated he, passionately. "You know, you must know that I love you. If you had been happy in your marriage I would never have spoken; but living the life you do, with that scoundrel. . . . Helena—my beloved."

"Don't," said she, with pale lips, "don't! You had better go."

"What! And leave you to be

killed by that brute. No! Darling —my darling girl." He caught her hands, and drew her to him. "All my life I have loved you—and you only. Why did you not wait. But," eagerly, "we have waited long enough, Helena. Come away with me. Leave this devil who has possessed you for a time, and seek life with me in——"

All in a moment she woke. She had been in a trance within his arms, but a vision had come to her —a vision of two little tiny ones who called her mother. Their eyes sought her—their voices cried to her. Better live the life of the most wretched being than desert them.

She drew back, a horrified expression on her face. "What are you saying?" cried she. "What would you make of me? Would you insult me too?——"

. . . . .

Miss Ranitch was a young woman of resources. She fought her way wherever she went, and she found the queer kind of beauty she possessed very useful now and then. She found it specially useful now—now that she required Lady Blackmore to ask her to dinner on the 11th.

Quite a fortnight ago she had heard that Mr. Grenthal was to be one of the guests invited for the grouse shooting; there could be no doubt about that intelligence, for the young man had communicated it to her himself. She had been governess to his little sisters before she came to Lady Blackmore, and as a fact his mother had sent her away ("passed her on" was the term), because of his infatuation for her. The Grenthals were an old family and rich, and the heir ought *to* make a good match. The heir,

however, had his own views—most heirs have. He thought Miss Ranitch the best match in the world.

He had written daily to her since she and her wonderful Russian eyes had been removed from his sight. And he wrote to her out of an honest heart. He told her all things. Of his family's unfailing objection to his marriage with her —it was impossible to conceal this —and of his undying love for her.

She felt quite sure of him. He would certainly marry her. He had tried hard for his invitation to the Blackmores' shooting, and had at last got it—all to be with Maria Ranitch again. His people, of course, did not know that Maria was Lady Blackmore's governess now, or probably there would have been a row on ; and at all events he

had got his invitation there, and—he would see Maria.

Thus he wrote to Miss Ranitch, who as a fact was wholly devoted to him. But a week ago, when she heard he would be here within a fortnight it had occurred to her that she would like to let him see her, not as the governess, but as an honoured guest—on equal terms with the others.

She had not been two days at Blackmore Hall before she noticed Blackmore's admiration of her. She was accustomed to admiration, and, with her heart full of Grenthal, thought little of his silly attention, which, however, was of a deeper depth than she imagined.

Once she learned, however, that Grenthal was to be one of the guests for the coming shoot, she had remembered his admiration, and *had played* upon it, until she had

brought him literally to her feet. Finding him there she made her terms. She would be asked to dinner on the 11th. She was unhappy being thus cast aside and discarded. She desired to be acknowledged as a lady—not as a mere hired person, but as a guest —an honoured—an acknowledged one.

When she came into the room with little Ethel's message to her mother, Miss Ranitch had looked at Blackmore. Her look was a question; was she to be invited to dinner to-morrow night?

The next day she waited for Blackmore in the clump of trees down by the lake. She knew he would come there at eleven o'clock. Not a word had ever been said by the governess, and she had refused to let a word be said by him, but for all that the place had become a

sort of rendezvous. Miss Ranitch was singularly discreet. Carefully cold, she held Blackmore back from her, and this beyond every thing else heightened her charms in his eyes. He had been accustomed all his selfish life to have things his own way, and to be thwarted—very gently thwarted, gave zest to his pursuit of her. To-day, as he came up, she glanced from her book to him, and rose with a little start. She always made a point of being surprised at his arrival.

She looked very handsome in her black hat, and knowing it, played him a little before putting the question, the answer to which she was dying to hear. Blackmore hummed and hawed—he hardly knew what to say, but finally he muttered something about Lady Blackmore having an old-fashioned *idea* about the governess for her

children devoting her whole time to them.

"She can hardly hold that theory," said Miss Ranitch, coldly, "as for the past week she has taken them almost completely out of my hands."

As a fact, Helena had, with a growing fear, that soon increased, brought the two children more into companionship with herself of late. If this governess could harm her—might she not harm her children even more? Whilst waiting for an opportunity to dismiss her, she kept the children steadily beneath her own eyes.

Blackmore hesitated again, and finally burst out hotly—

"The fact is, she is jealous of you!"

"Of me!" Miss Ranitch drew up her handsome figure and turned on him the glance of injured inno-

cence. "Why should Lady Blackmore be jealous of me?"

"Well, hang it all, you know. She——" He paused.

"I really don't know!" severely.

"Oh! confound it! Well, then, she knows very well that I——"

Miss Ranitch lowered her eyes, then looked up at him out of the corners of them, and finally smiled.

"Oh! if it is only you!" said she. "I quite feared you were going to say she was jealous of—Mr. Wingfield!"

She watched him narrowly as she said this. She owed Lady Blackmore something for her refusal to receive her at dinner, and she began to pay the debt as soon as possible. Blackmore coloured quickly and frowned. Then made a gesture, as if to throw something from him.

"Hah! You, too, have noticed *that!*" said he.

"It is so very noticeable!" She glanced at him again. "She shows poor taste," said she, "to prefer him to you!"

This gross flattery was well received.

"She may go to the devil for me!" said Blackmore, out of whom drink and sin of many sorts had driven the Angel that once might have dwelt with him. "So long as I can see you, and tell you how I—admire you!"

"Ah! If that is all!"

"It isn't. By Jove, Maria" (for the first time he called her by her Christian name—if she had anything Christian about her)—"I think you——"

"You shouldn't think," archly. "You shouldn't, really. It spoils you." The almost insolent sarcasm in her speech was lost on him. But she enjoyed it herself.

"You don't mind, then, my telling you that I am——"

"My friend? No, indeed!"

"More than that," said he. He made a movement as if to clasp her in his arms, but she evaded him. "I love you."

"You will prove it?"

"Prove it. But how—how?"

"By compelling Lady Blackmore to ask me to dinner to-night."

"I will—I swear I will. And now for that promise you owe me something surely—one kiss."

"No, no." She put him back, laughing sweetly. "When the promise is fulfilled. Then—after dinner—in the garden—" (she named a little corner where the shrubs grew thick).

. . . . .

Lady Blackmore sat in her boudoir, both the children with *her*. She had told Miss Ranitch

she wished to have them for the morning. They sat on the carpet playing with some bricks whilst she sat and sewed, and thought! Her thoughts were miserable. She was not a weak woman, and her soul revolted within her against the treatment she was receiving from this man who had sworn to be her protector through life. And that woman! The governess! She threw back her head with an involuntary movement of silent anger. It was the silence that was so depressing. How could she speak, and to whom? How blazon her own despair abroad! Many guests were coming to-night—but there was not one among them to whom she could tell her sorrowful tale. There was no one in the world to whom she could speak——

She stopped short there. Suddenly she remembered that she had

spoken. And to—him. To Paul! Oh! what madness drove her to it! She was a proud woman, who would have kept her wretchedness to her own heart until her dying day—but last night had proved too much for her. . . . It had proved, too, what she had for long refused to acknowledge—that Paul Wingfield was more to her than any other living creature. For long she had rejected the idea. But now she knew. And the knowledge, though passing sweet, still galled her pride.

She sighed impatiently and moved, and at this moment her needle ran into her finger. The slight pain, so far slighter than the other, still coming on it, irritated her. She became suddenly aware that her little son was fighting angrily with her little girl over the bricks. With the quick impatience of an *angry* woman she turned on the

first thing that gave her reason for outspoken wrath.

"Leo! Be silent! Do you hear!" Her voice rang through the room to where the children were—children who seldom heard from her aught but loving words. "How dare you tease your little sister like that? You are a tyrant! A tyrant!"

The boy, though cowed, rose.

"I am not teasing her—and the bricks are mine as well as hers. And I'm not a tyrant. Father wouldn't call me one!" The word was fuel to the fire.

Blackmore, to his wife's horror, had insisted on taking notice of the handsome boy—bringing him in to the dining-room when the ladies had left—and so on.

"Don't answer me like that!" She got up and looked down at him —at the dark, defiant, loving little

face on the brink of tears. She ought to have seen the tears; but the poor woman was saddened out of all wisdom. "Your father! He is spoiling you; ruining you! Some day you will be like him. You *are* like him—you——!"

The violence of her miserable anger died down then—killed by the surprise in the child's glance. Suddenly she burst into tears and pulled the boy to her, and pressed him convulsively against her bosom, that seemed bursting.

"Oh, Leo! Oh, darling! Oh, don't mind what I have said. You are my sweetest—sweetest boy. The best boy—your poor mother's own boy!" She pressed him to her again and again, and kissed him wildly, and the little fellow, being indeed more hers than his father's, and with a stout little loving heart *of his* own, clung to her in return *with* all his small might.

It was at this moment that Blackmore entered the room.

"Send those brats away," said he.

"But why?"

"Because I wish to speak to you once more, of what we talked of last night. I do not wish them to hear that you hold the woman whom you have engaged to bring them up properly, to be unfit to associate with their mother."

"If that is all," said she; "they need not go. I have thought over the matter, and—this certainly is your house. I have hardly anything to do with it—beyond bearing its most useless name of mistress. Invite Miss Ranitch to dine with you, by all means. *I* shall not invite her. But then," spreading abroad her white and lovely hands; "I am a mere cypher here!"

"I mark your obstinacy, even whilst giving in. You will not,

however, I presume, be rude to her if I send the message to her?"

"I shall not see her possibly. It will be a large party. And"—slowly—"I am never rude!"

So Miss Ranitch got her invitation. She accepted it—insulting as it was—coming from the master of the house. But she felt she would go a long way to gain her own ends.

There was a slight greeting between her and young Grenthal in the drawing-room, and a hurried word. It was a word to meet him in the gardens, after dinner. She had seen his high joy at finding her an honoured guest at Lady Blackmore's table—Lady Blackmore who was so much more than usually select, to make up—as every one said—for her husband's improprieties. He could tell his people of that. It would remove half

their objections to his marriage—especially as now seeing him so insistent they had almost given in.

Miss Ranitch had remembered that other appointment in the garden; and laughed over it to herself. It seemed so good a thing. There would be that silly fool Blackmore waiting for her at that point, whilst she and her lover were being so happy together at quite the other end of the garden. She could hardly control her spirits at dinner!

It was ten o'clock as Blackmore stole from the house and went to the rendezvous that she had given him. He had drunk a good deal more than was good for him at dinner, and had taken a glass of brandy before stepping from the balcony down to the grass plot beneath.

He went stealthily towards the

spot she had assigned. And passing behind the little clump of shrubs waited. No one was there, however. Not a sound, not a sigh, broke the stillness of the night. He waited twenty minutes, and then came to the conclusion that she had been prevented from meeting him. No doubt Helena, in her confounded jealousy, had sent her back to the schoolroom.

There was a path through the garden that led to the schoolroom window. He determined to follow it, to look in, to see if there was a light.

This path, winding through the gardens, went past a small arbour, decked with roses in summer, in autumn by the gorgeous Virginian creeper; as he drew near it—he heard sounds, low, faint, but unmistakable. The voice was the voice of the woman whom he had

come out to meet. He waited a moment, and then crept near—to the very side of the arbour, and there stood and looked and listened.

Miss Ranitch was laughing in a low, subdued way, but with intense amusement in her tone.

"Oh! Blackmore! But he's such a fool. You think he was too attentive to me? But that is your folly. You think all men love me, when really it is only one who loves me—and that is—you! That is true, isn't it?" She held out her arms to Grenthal who was with her, and he caught her rapturously to his breast.

"At all events there is one thing true," said she, leaning back from him and smiling into his eyes. "That I love you—and you only!"

"But Blackmore——"

"Pah! Why trouble over him. A great, big, hideous thing like

that. I understand him. I can manage him."

The man outside listening, shivered with rage. Truly she had managed him. She had managed him so effectually that she had made him insult his wife that she might make herself the more desirable in her lover's eyes.

Blackmore went as quickly as he could towards the entrance to the arbour. He felt he was swaying from side to side; that was nothing —he often drank too much—but now there was a queer throbbing or catching in his left side. It troubled him because it would not suffer him to draw his breath easily. He stumbled into the arbour, and looked straight at Miss Ranitch.

"You devil!" said he, thickly. "Is this how you treat me? Only this morning you swore that if I *could* induce Lady Blackmore

against her will to let you dine with her and her guests to-night—a thing she scorned to do—you would meet me here to-night; and for payment—what was I to have for payment? You remember, eh?" His face was flaming now, most unnaturally, and his features were distorted. "You remember, too, all our meetings down by the lake. Hah! They would not be so tasteful to your lover here, as they were to me. Come now"—in a bantering, half-drunken tone—"tell him what you promised me as a reward for your invitation to dinner—Was it——"

He swayed as he spoke, and suddenly the governess thrust a footstool before him. His foot caught against it, and he fell heavily—striking his forehead with great force against the woodwork of the arbour. Grenthal had seen *her* action.

Blackmore lay motionless. Grenthal stooped over him. Presently he knew that he was dead. He raised himself, and Miss Ranitch laid her hand upon his arm. He shook her off.

"Don't touch me!" said he, with a shudder; "traitress—and —murderess!"

NELLIE'S DILEMMA.

"MY dearest child, I'm afraid you will have to go!"

The speaker — a fashionably dressed young woman of about twenty-nine — is stooping over a slight girl, whose head is upon her knees, and who is crying bitterly.

"I can't! I *won't* go there. I hate her."

"My good child, we all hate her. But what does

that come to? She has made her little pile, and some one of us must be the better of it. She'll do all she knows about it, but her very best efforts won't keep her alive for ever. Now me she detests, and Mary she abhors, and——"

"She was simply *beastly* to me the last time I saw her."

"Certainly. I can quite understand that. She is beastly to everybody. You had better forget that word, however, when you are with her; she doesn't like the phraseology of the present day, as she told Mary, when Mary said her Italian greyhound was a 'spook.' It was certainly awfully thin—*starved!* But she's got money, my dear Nell, and you haven't."

"I've enough," says Nell.

"To starve on! Of course, I know Nellie, that I've got *enough* for you and me. Poor

John," stroking her beautiful black silk dress, covered with jet (she is in second mourning for her husband) with a reflective hand, "left me all he could; but, honestly, Nell, even if I had more, I could not bear the thought of Aunt Maria's money going out of the family. Come, cheer up. She has only asked you for six months after all."

"After all." Nellie L'Estrange repeats the words in high disgust. She raises herself and opens her eyes and begins to look out upon the world again. It is not the thought of having to stay with her old maiden aunt for six months that has brought the tears to her eyes. There is something more, far more than that, though she would have died rather than confess it, even to herself. She would have to leave George—Sir George Mayfair!

And yet Sir George has never yet said one word to her that could make her think he felt even the smallest particular interest in her. On the contrary, indeed, he had seemed to be rather special in his attentions to Isabel, her widowed sister. Poor little Nell, watching —waiting—miserable, had noted many times when Sir George and Isabel Forster had sat out a dance in a conservatory, or lingered behind shrubs at a flower show, or got lost in the crowd coming out from the theatre. She had never suspected that these stolen interviews had been arranged by Mayfair with a view to learning from Nellie's sister if Nellie herself had the smallest, faintest regard for him.

So well did the girl guard her secret, that Mrs. Forster (who *would* have encouraged a marriage

between her sister and Sir George with all her heart), never suspecting the love lying in the girl's heart, was afraid to put it to the touch, by asking her plainly of her feeling for Sir George—lest she should by precipitancy destroy the hope at once; and indeed when old Lady Berwick (Aunt Maria of dreaded memory) wrote to ask Nellie on a visit to her castle in North Wales, Mrs. Forster had hailed the invitation with delight. Not only would it give her pretty sister the chance of inheriting an enormous fortune, but the intolerable dulness of the place might lead her to regard Sir George with some tenderness on her return.

"Six months!" says Nellie. "Do, you think six months are nothing? You speak of them as though they were six days. No, I sha'n't go!"

"What nonsense, Nell! To give up a large fortune for the sake of a few months' endurance. I grant you it will be bad. I know Aunt Maria as well as anybody. But what a glorious position, if she makes you her heiress. You will be one of the richest girls in England."

"I don't want to be."

"My good child, that is rubbish! Every one wants to be the richest person in the world."

"*I* don't," petulantly. "I only want to be allowed to stay here quietly. But——" she pauses, and casts a sudden angry glance at her sister—"you want to get rid of me," says she.

Now, considering Nell has always told herself that Sir George is quite indifferent to her, this accusation to say the least of it is most uncalled-for. Fortunately

Mrs. Forster hasn't the faintest idea of her meaning.

"I? *I* want to get rid of you? Why, I'm quite sacrificing myself," cries that lively widow, "in sending you away. You are my right hand; you are, in fact, a sort of protection!"

Nell gives a scornful laugh. She has quite recovered from her tears now, and only a pretty plaintive pinkness round her eyes shows that she has been crying.

"I like that!" says she.

"Well, it's true. If I chaperon you—you chaperon me too. Perhaps you will pardon my saying so," says the youthful widow, "when," regarding herself complacently in a full length mirror let into the wall on her right, "you *look* at me. I am still young. I belong to the right side of thirty. I am still five years away from that

detestable age; and if I were to receive my men friends *solus*—you would see me in the 'Hue and Cry' in a week. Therefore I keep you as a safeguard."

"Thank you," says Nell, with a tilt of her pretty chin.

"Thank you for nothing is what you ought to have said; I keep you for my own good. I send you away for yours. What I want to explain to you is that it is pure unselfishness on my part this lending you to aunt —our 'dear unmarried aunt.' I shall be desolated while you are away. But let me be desolated; you will come back to me a millionairess!"

"I'm not going!" says Nell, with sudden vehemence. "Nothing shall take me there! Rather than go I—*I'd marry the first man that asks me!*"

Neither of them have heard the

door open. It is with a most obvious start that Isabel Forster, turning, sees Sir George Mayfair coming up the room. It is quite impossible but that he must have heard that last threat.

"You, Sir George?" says she, with charming grace, covering her confusion with an even greater degree of cordiality than usual, a fact which makes poor Nell's heart sink. "We are having such an argument, Nell and I. Our aunt, Lady Maria, has asked her to spend the winter with her, and Nell objects. But Aunt Maria has money to leave—much," spreading out her arms, "oh, *so* much—and I want Nell to get it."

"Are you so insensible to the charms of lucre, Miss L'Estrange?" asks Sir George, looking at the back of her head. There is nothing more of Nell to be seen indeed

at this moment. After a hasty greeting she had withdrawn into the window.

"I am insensible to the charms of Aunt Maria," returns she, in a muffled tone. She will not turn round, she is so afraid he will see that she has been crying. After a minute or two indeed she makes her escape from the room.

"Must she go?" asks Sir George of her sister when they are alone.

"She *must* not, of course. But it seems madness to fling away a big fortune like that—Lady Maria is eighty-five, if a day, and can't possibly live much longer. Why should not Nell have her money, rather than a hospital for rats? She is quite capable of founding one," says Mrs. Forster, petulantly.

"Still—to make her unhappy!"

"For six months out of her *life!*"

"Who can tell how long one's life is going to last? She looked very miserable," says Sir George, whose heart is bleeding for Nell. "Can I—could I—see her?"

"Certainly," says Mrs. Forster, impatiently, who is still a little indignant that he has not taken her view of the question, "she is in the small room off the morning room—dabbing at her paints as usual, no doubt."

Sir George loses no time; crossing the hall he soon finds himself in the room indicated. The girl is leaning over an easel, painting slowly, lifelessly, yet with care.

"What a charming picture!" says Mayfair—who is indeed surprised at the youthful vigour the half-finished picture contains.

"Oh,—you?" She has turned round as if shot. She had not known he was so close to her.

"Not charming," says she, nervously.

"*I* think it so. I mean it really ——" He pauses and looks at her. "I wonder if *you* mean all that you say?"

"I?"

"Yes. You!"

"Why should you doubt that?" asks she, paint brush in hand, her eyes lowered.

"Because," he takes a step nearer to her, "The fact is," says he, "I heard what you said just as I was coming into your sister's drawing-room a while ago."

"You heard——" The girl looks at him with eyes widened—with her whole heart a-fire. Oh! *what* had he heard? Had he heard *that?*

Evidently he had.

"You said that rather than go to *stay* with your aunt, you—would

marry the first man who asked you! —You *did* say that?"

"Yes," faintly.

He goes nearer to her and takes her hand.

"Nell, did you mean it?"

"Yes," more faintly still.

"Then I claim your promise. I am the first man who can possibly have asked you to marry him, since that half hour ago. Nell"—he draws her to him—"Nell, your answer?"

"Oh, you can't, you don't mean it," says she, hiding her face with the one hand that remains to her.

"If you think that I don't mean that I love you, you are entirely at fault," says he. "I have loved you Nell for years, I think; for months, at all events—and you—you would give me no encouragement."

"Because," says Nell, turning away from him so that he cannot

see her face, "because I thought you were in love with—Isabel."

"Is that all?" says he. He catches her in his arms and strains her to him. "Oh, how happy we are going to be."

. . . .

An hour afterwards Isabel seeks her.

"And so you thought he was in love with me?" cries she, her eyes alight with laughter. "Silly, silly child! Why, I promised Lord Hardinge to marry him a month ago. So much for your suspicions, you baby! And what about Aunt Maria? I expect," maliciously, "both you and George had better go and stay with her as a sort of under-study for your honeymoon, before your marriage."

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